MAKE **ANCESTRY HINTS** WORK HARDER FOR YOU

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 226 JANUARY 2025 £5.75

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®

WELSH ROOTS
FIND CLUES ONLINE

50 WEBSITES TO WATCH

Find out which family history records are coming online in our 2025 preview

ARMY ENGINEERS

Trace REME soldiers with **NEW** online records

FIND YOUR WILTSHIRE KIN

Our guide to county records and resources

How I turned detective to solve a Victorian illegitimacy case

COASTGUARDS

From stopping smugglers to saving lives at sea

THE GREAT PLAGUE

How our ancestors survived a hideous epidemic

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- The Rhondda Valley's history
- The archive of a cross-dressing star
- A sporting family legacy explored

DISCOVER THE WHOLE PICTURE

When you explore your family tree, you find names, dates and places. But it's the extra details that truly reveal your family story.

Ancestry has a huge range of historical records, and with an average of two million added every day, there's always more to discover. So even when you think you know your family, they can keep surprising you.

ancestry®
Bring your backstory to life™

Do you have a fascinating family story to share?

We'd love to hear about your discoveries, email us at *yourstory@ancestry.co.uk*

Welcome

Sarah's Top Tip

Even if you don't have Welsh ancestors it's worth checking their newspapers

You would think with the surname Williams that I was awash with Welsh forebears, but that's not the case. However, even if your ancestors didn't hail from Wales, it's worth visiting the lead site in our 'Best Websites' article this month (**page 35**). Wales has long been a popular holiday destination, and in the late 19th and early 20th century newspapers for tourist hotspots would list guesthouse visitors. I have found family in these lists and also discovered that my grandfather, as a child, fell off a rock while on holiday in Tenby. I love Tenby, and it's great to know that past generations have stayed there too.

There's nothing like the start of a new year to inspire me to look ahead at what the future holds, so join us on **page 14** as we reveal some of the genealogical treats coming in 2025. No surprise, I suppose, that Ancestry will be launching its own version of the 1921 census for England and Wales now that Findmypast has lost its exclusivity, but that's just one of dozens of record releases to look forward to. We've been reporting on the National Burial Grounds Survey for years, so I'm delighted to see that the project plans to launch its first tranche of records in 2025. There's plenty on the horizon, and the growth in artificial intelligence means that records and transcriptions will start coming online faster and faster.

One of the most exciting collections being digitised is Second World War records, as a result of the partnership between Ancestry, The National Archives and the Ministry of Defence. It was a real treat for me to visit TNA recently and see some of the physical records that are being digitised. Turn to **page 28** to find out what you can uncover if you have a relative who served with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Records for other corps will come soon.

All in all, we've got plenty to celebrate in 2025. I hope it is a fruitful year for all of our readers. Enjoy the issue and happy new year!

Sarah

Sarah Williams Editor
sarah.williams@ourmedia.co.uk

Get In Touch

Advertising
t 0117 300 8803
e *andy.williams@ourmedia.co.uk*

Editorial & Website Queries
t 0117 300 8621
e *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Magazine App Support
w *ourmediaapps.co.uk/digital-contact-form*

Q&A Queries
e *wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk*

Subscriptions Help & FAQs
t 03330 162120*
t +44 1604 973728 (overseas)
w *ourmediashop.com/contactus*
w *ourmediashop.com/faqs*

*UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed-line numbers (starting 01 or 02) and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff). Outside of free call packages call charges from mobile phones will cost between 3p and 55p per minute. Lines are open Monday to Friday 9am–5pm.

Contributors

Jonathan Scott
Every year our 'Best Websites' writer contacts dozens of organisations to ask what their online plans are for the future. Turn to **page 14** to see what Jonathan uncovered.

Phil Tomaselli
Our military expert, Phil, said he struggled to fit everything into his guide to REME records on **page 28**. There's so much to say now that WW2 service records are coming online.

Dr Evelyn Lord
Author of many books including *The Great Plague: When Death Came to Cambridge in 1665*, historian Evelyn explores London's experience of the plague for us on **page 52**.

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/CHILDREN WATCH THE FINAL REHEARSAL FOR AN RAF PAGEANT AT HENDON, 28 JUNE 1935

CONTENTS
JANUARY 2025

FEATURES

14 Websites To Watch ON THE COVER
From Irish population records to new material from both world wars, Jonathan Scott reveals the releases that you can't afford to miss in our seven-page preview of 2025

52 The Great Plague ON THE COVER
Evelyn Lord takes us inside the horrors of the Great Plague of London, and explains how our 17th-century forebears survived this terrible epidemic

RESEARCH ADVICE

28 Focus On ON THE COVER
Phil Tomaselli shares his expert advice for researching an ancestor who served in the British Army's Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

35 Best Websites ON THE COVER
Jonathan Scott presents the essential online resources for researching your Welsh roots

38 Record Masterclass ON THE COVER
Dr Simon Wills explains the long history of the British Coastguard, and how to make the most of a collection of records recently added to Findmypast

50 Tech Tips ON THE COVER
Nick Peers reveals how to tag the relatives in your Ancestry family tree to get more relevant hints

YOUR RESEARCH

24 Reader Story ON THE COVER
Kim Thompson has uncovered several sporting champions among her relations, including husband-and-wife tennis players, a dog sledder and a boxer

58 Eureka Moment ON THE COVER
"I turned detective to solve a Victorian illegitimacy case," says Jenny May Forsyth

74 Family Hero
Anthony Patterson's cousin co-created a product that families have enjoyed for generations: Bisto

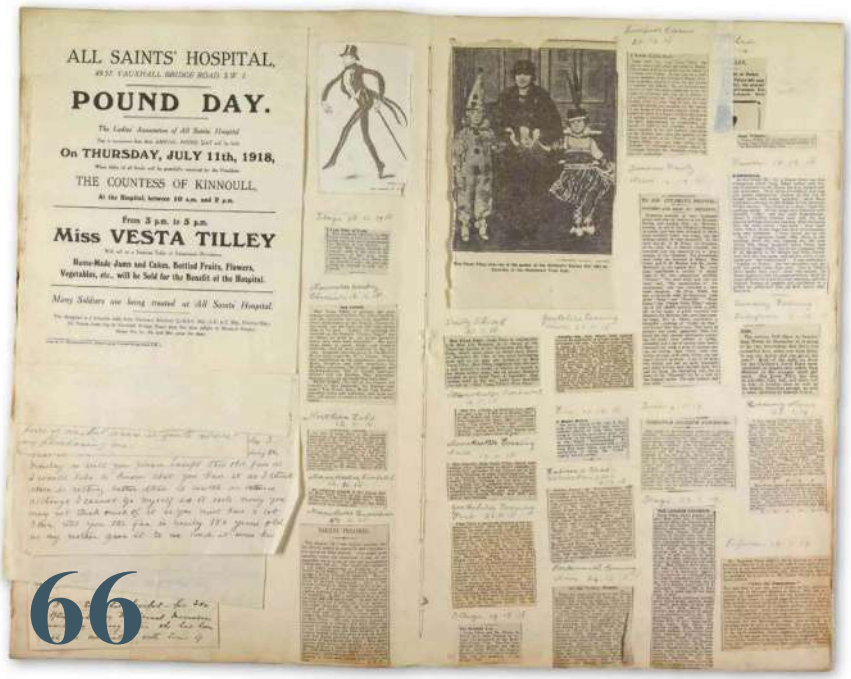
REGULARS

6 Letters
Your ideas, comments and advice

9 What's On
Online and in-person talks, shows and exhibitions

10 News
All of the latest developments, including the opening of the Staffordshire History Centre and the digitisation of a soldier's sketchbooks from the First World War

GETTY IMAGES / SHIELA BROOMFIELD



66

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER 22

SUBSCRIBE TODAY AND GET A MONTH'S FREE TRIAL

13 Off The Record
Alan Crosby mourns an aunt who lived life to the full

41 Q&A
Our ingenious experts smash your most frustrating brick walls, from the mystery of a great uncle's First World War battalion to researching a common name in Wales and making sense of settlement examinations

47 Your Projects ON THE COVER
Rosemary Collins finds out about a project exploring the rich past and exciting future of the Rhondda Valley

48 The Big Picture
Celebrities perform at a charity radio broadcast in Hollywood on 31 December 1940

57 *Wdytya? Magazine* Shop
Back issues, wall charts and magazine storage

62 Around Britain ON THE COVER
Jonathan Scott tracks down the latest resources if you have Wiltshire roots, and hears how volunteers are indexing a collection of First World War tribunal records

66 Gem From The Archive ON THE COVER
A cross-dressing music-hall star's scrapbook, 1918

GUIDE

68 Books & Digital Picks
This month's family history inspiration

70 TV & Radio
Lucy Worsley returns for a new series of investigations

38

28

24

WORCESTERSHIRE ARCHIVE AND ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE / GETTY IMAGES / UNP/VICTOR DE JESUS

62

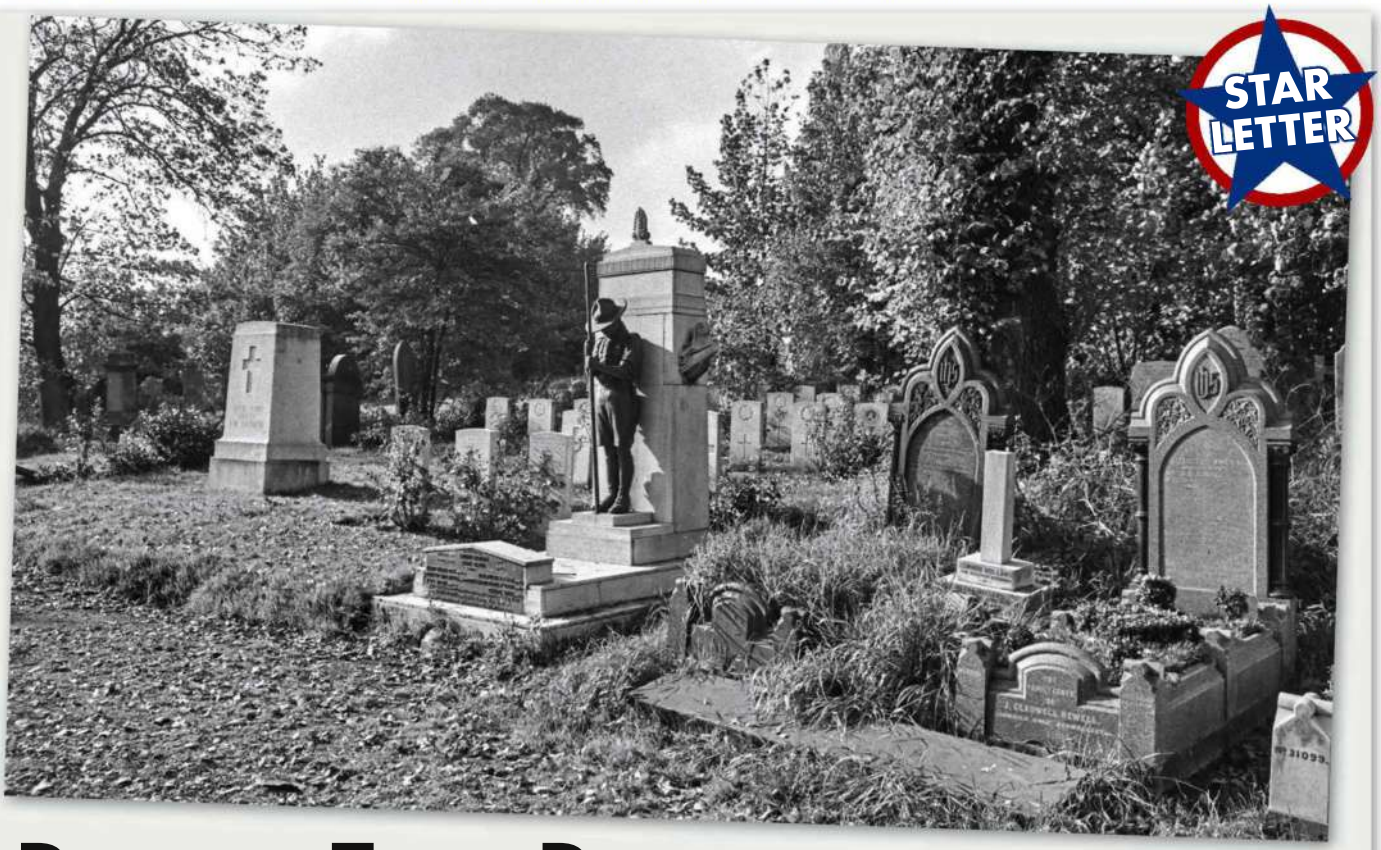
74

Letters

Email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*
Write to *WDYTYA? Magazine*, Eagle House, Bristol BS1 4ST

WIN an AncestryDNA test kit from **ancestry.co.uk**
WORTH £79

The writer of our star letter wins an AncestryDNA test **worth £79** – so drop us a line and share your thoughts with us.



This photograph from 1965 depicts the monument to the boys who died, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott

Baths For Boys

I have just read Alan Crosby's column headlined "The Joys of Bath Night" in the December issue, which has reminded me of the brief history I have written of the Hollington Boys Club (the Dulwich College Mission). The club was founded in the last years of the 19th century in a forgotten and neglected district west of Camberwell Road in South London, where welfare as such was virtually non-existent. Houses were badly lit, if at all, sanitation was poor, and people lived in overcrowded conditions – so personal hygiene was, to say the least, very difficult. The area was classed by Charles Booth in *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1889–1891) as among the most deprived in the city.

The story of the mission is one of courage and discernment, and the growth of a social conscience leading to the discovery in very ordinary working-class boys of high qualities which, having survived generations of poverty and neglect, responded to friendship and leadership. Boys and masters at the college devoted a great deal of time to the club, which was largely funded by old boys and weekly collections at the school. By 1895 the club had over 100 members, and by 1905 there were 110 juniors aged 10–14 and 120 seniors on the first floor of a new clubhouse. The top floor had a gym and a bathroom with five baths and a drying room which became one of the most popular features of the club; it was fitted with a hot-water system.

A doctor visited the club at least once a week, and kept meticulous and comprehensive records of every boy. These are held in the school archives, and form a useful resource for genealogists.

Apart from this and the usual youth-club activities the club provided evening classes and counselling sessions, and found work for most of the older boys – even providing bicycles where they were needed to help the boys get to work.

Tragically, in 1912 some 24 of the boys in the club's sea-scout group (including David Beckham's great grandfather Edward) were sailing a 32-foot cutter down the Thames from Waterloo to camp at Leysdown in Sheppey when it capsized. Eight of them drowned but Edward was rescued, although he lost his brother William. Winston Churchill arranged for a destroyer to bring the bodies home where 100,000 people attended their lying in state at St John's Church in Camberwell. A monument was erected in Nunhead Cemetery paid for by public subscription.
Jeremy Baker, by email

Editor Replies **Thank you for sharing this fascinating story with us Jeremy. We take baths (and doctors) for granted nowadays, but it must have really helped those boys.**

GETTY IMAGES

Memories Of France

I enjoyed Alan Crosby's article on "The Joys of Bath Night" in the December issue of the magazine. This took me back to the summer of 1953 when, on a three-month break from living in the Tropics, my mother, brother and I went to stay at the home of my maternal grandmother in rural France.

The family lived in a traditional farmhouse in a small village and had a fairly simple, hardworking life at a time when the country was still recovering from war.

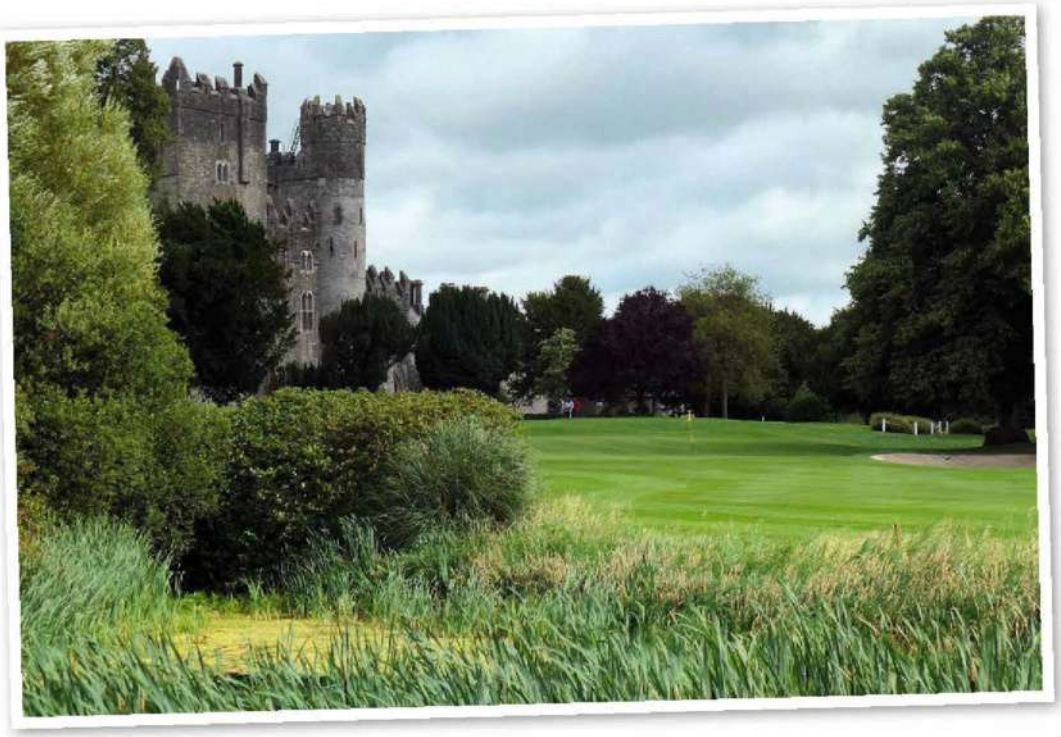
There was still no mains water. What was accessible came from a pump connected to an artesian well, which went straight into a large kitchen sink. The loo was in a small hut in the back garden!

Mum liked to bathe us, so we were put into the sink, which was in front of a large window in view of everyone in the main street (just a muddy track). Our French friends used to watch and laugh at us much to my embarrassment!

I am glad to have experienced traditional farming life, which hadn't changed since Napoleonic times. We loved taking the cattle to the meadows twice a day, after milking, and our cousin Antoine taking us on long walks to show us his fields, helping with the hay harvest and riding back on top of the full horse-drawn hay cart. We always slept well. And I slept with my grandmother!

Marie-Christine Frost, Withernsea, East Yorkshire

Editor Replies **Thank you so much Marie-Christine for sharing your fascinating memories with us.**



Raymond visited Kilkea Castle near Castledermot in County Kildare as part of his research into his family history

Joss O'Kelly responded to an article on our website about Channel 5's documentary *Princes in the Tower: A Damning Discovery* at tinyurl.com/wdytya-princes

I thought that Philippa Langley had dealt with this and proved that Richard did not kill the princes and in fact they went on to live for ages. Thanks for the tip though – I will watch it.

Identity Dilemma

I've found it difficult to avoid bias when exploring my ancestry. Initially, I chose to ignore the clashing traditions of my mother's English background in favour of my father's Gaelic roots. Amalgamating both was like mixing oil and water. But I could not sustain the artificiality of selective family history as my understanding deepened about the important distinctions between our genomic base and our cognitive views of self. This was easily demonstrated in the blending of my Gaelic and English DNA that have worked in perfect harmony for over 75 years.

The tensions between what we are and who we think we are is common within families, especially with mixed ethnicities. But ignoring any side of one's ancestry creates a blind spot that inhibits clarity of perception.

I decided to seep myself into the Old English culture of Ireland by spending four nights in two Anglo-Norman castles in Counties Kildare and Waterford while reading Thomas Finan's *Landscape and History on the Medieval Irish Frontier* (Brepols, 2016). My retreat resulted in what I now see as close parallels between the notion of the medieval 'middle nation' and what I might call the 'middle perspective' that can accommodate my Gaelic and English traditions.

I have outlined my thoughts in the article "Taking Account of Human Genetics in Identity Research" published in the *Journal of Genetic Genealogy* (**jogg.info/article/111-001/**).

Distinguishing identity from perspectives of self is not popular with most social scientists who are, incidentally, unenthusiastic about embracing human genetics in identity studies. However, the acceptance of a middle perspective results in a solution of 'harmonious tension'.

Raymond M Keogh, Director, Our Own Identity, Ireland

Editor Replies **Thank you for sharing the link to your article. I'm sure that other readers will have had mixed feelings about which part of their ancestry they most identify with.**

Why Not Put Family Historians On TV?

I'm a big supporter of the BBC, but they sometimes tend to make assumptions about what viewers would be interested in – and it is telling that correspondence so often starts up about the choice of participants when a new series of *WDYTYA?* is announced. The argument that viewers would not be interested in 'ordinary' people and that celebrities are more versed in camerawork really doesn't hold water. We need look no further than the success of ITV's *Long Lost Family*.

A better argument might be that the producers cannot invest the necessary time and resources in researching the genealogy of random members of the general public until they find someone with sufficiently interesting stories to make a one-hour programme. That is why choosing people who have already done some of their own research would be a better bet. You would then have subjects with a sufficient pre-existing interest to have actually done something about it, and some guaranteed stories to build on. A lot of the ground work might have been done – for example, genealogical records could already have been obtained and various relatives spoken to.

There would also be an opportunity to explore professions and elements of social history that have not hitherto received a lot of attention in the series. By way of example, although I'm a humble retired teacher I could offer, in the 19th century, missionary work in India and Sri Lanka, a dentist, and a line of seamen in the Victorian Navy including a chief schoolmaster; then, in the 20th century, there is a pioneering therapeutic community, an inventor, someone who helped the daughter of a famous playwright escape the Nazis,

an attempt at the first round-the-world flight, an appearance on postwar TV, and more besides.

The format would have to evolve, perhaps with more focus on verifying, amplifying and adding depth to these stories, more discussion of sources, a need to address the odd brick wall and so on. But I've no doubt that it would encourage budding family historians to see that anybody can research their own ancestors, and that many of us have interesting tales to tell.
Nick Hobbs, by email

Editor Replies If the stories our readers send in are anything to go by, I think that we could make a very interesting TV series about 'ordinary' people's roots.

Appalling Treatment

Having read the letter from Katharine McKinnon about her Futter relations in the October edition, I thought that you might be interested in a similar tale.

One of my ancestors was Edward Wilde. He was born in Norwich in 1852 to Edward and Rebecca Wilde (née Carter). In December 1869 Edward married Mary Ann Walpole, and between 1870 and 1879 the couple had five children. He is living with Mary Ann and their children in Norwich on the 1881 census.

Come the 1891 census, Edward is living as a lodger with a Rebecca Tilney and her children. Rebecca describes herself as married, although there is no sign of her husband, and Edward also says he is married. Mary Ann is with their children elsewhere in Norwich, and says that she is married as well.

A newspaper hint had come up on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) concerning Edward and Rebecca, so I investigated. What I found was an appalling catalogue of neglect and ill treatment.

Edward is first up in court in 1870, being accused by Mary Ann of assault, and is sentenced to 14 days' hard labour. He is back in court in 1876 when Mary Ann accuses him of ongoing ill treatment, telling the court that he has left her only straw to lie on because furniture has been sold to pay for drink. At another court appearance in 1879 he is again accused of assaulting Mary Ann, and gets two months' hard labour.

A newspaper report of 1891 has Rebecca Tilney accusing Edward of assault, saying that they had now separated. In the report he knocks her down and says, "Take that for the children's money." However, by 1895 the couple are back together, and there is an article with Edward being accused by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children of child neglect and cruelty. The couple would go into the workhouse from time to time, and on coming out they would argue – Edward would then stay with his mother leaving Rebecca destitute. She would have to pawn blankets and other possessions, so the children of the relationship (there were four surviving) were left without proper clothing, furniture or bedding. Also the NSPCC inspector stated that Edward would go to the workhouse to avoid punishment for child neglect.

The magistrates ruled that it was the "most disgraceful case" that they had ever seen, and that the children had been "shamefully neglected". Edward was given one month in prison with hard labour, and Rebecca 14 days with hard labour. The children were removed from their care. The two eldest went to an industrial school until they were 16, and the younger two went into Norwich Union Workhouse.

There are also numerous reports of Rebecca assaulting others and damaging property.

I have traced the children of Edward's marriage to Mary Ann, and two of his children with Rebecca. Edward died in 1928, Mary Ann in 1935. Rebecca (née Edwards) died in 1914, and her husband Frederick Greenwood Tilney in 1928.
Harriet Hopkins, by email

Editor Replies Newspapers are amazing for giving us granular detail of our ancestors' lives.

CHARG OF NEGLECTING CHILDREN IN NORWICH.

At the Norwich Guildhall this morning, before W' Hunter (Chairman), A. R. Chamberlin, and H. Our ' Esqs.,

Edward Wilde, shoemaker, of Rosemary Lane, was summoned on the information of Inspector Starks for neglecting four children in such a manner as to cause them unnecessary suffering on December 30th. Mr. E. Reeve appeared to prosecute on behalf of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and defendant pleaded not guilty.

Mr. Reeve said that on October 24th defendant was convicted of neglecting the children. When he came out of prison he went to the Workhouse, and induced the woman and his illegitimate children to come out and live with him. He therfore contended that the defendant ought to provid for their comfort, by taking upon himself the custody of the children. Affiliation orders had been made upon the defendant, and if the children were kept in the house, the Guardians enforced the law, but if they lived with the man, the woman would take no steps. He wished the woman could have been prosecuted with the man, as she came out of the Union where the children were properly attended to.

Inspector Starks said that on December 30th he visited defendant's house in Rosemary Lane and saw Rebecca Tilney and her four children. There was no furniture whatever in the lower room, and witness went upstairs, where he found the four children huddled r und the fire-place. It was a very cold night. The only furniture in the room were two ch irs and an old iron bedstead. The e were no bed clothes or clothing about, and witness could not find any food in the house. Superintendent Mason visited the house, and the witness communicated with Relieving-officer Dent. He went with him to the house later in the evening, and then found the woman and children were gone to her father's house. The children were fairly well nourished. The neglect consisted in their being deprived of bedding.

Superintendent Mason deposed to going to defendant's house with Inspector Starks. They found nothing in the bottom room, but saw Rebecca Tilney and the children crouched round a small fire in a bedroom. There were only two chairs and a piece of a bedstead in the room. It was a bitterly cold night and the woman and children appeared to be suffering from the cold.

Relieving-officer Dent said that on the 29th of December, defendant applied for an order for the workhouse. Witness asked him where Tilney was? and he said she was living in Rosemary Lane. Witness then said "Where is the furniture?" and defendant replied "I have taken it away. She is not going to have me this time, she will soon be up for an order." Defendant did not go into the house that day.

In defence Wilde was sworn, and said he told the woman on December 30th that he intended applying for an order for the workhouse as he had no work. He went out several times during the day, and when he came home in the evening he found the woman and children had gone.

Cross-examined—He removed all the bed clothes and things on the Saturday morning. The women was then away from the house but the children were there. He did not go to the Workhouse because he thought he might be able to start work on the Monday. The women sent for him to come and take her out of the Workhouse, and he went after her on November 25th.

The magistrates thought it would be very much wiser if the defendant altered his mode of living. They, however, dismissed the case.

One of the newspaper articles that Harriet discovered on Findmypast

@helpfulhint1 responded to news of the closure of London's Smithfield and Billingsgate markets
Think of all the historical events that these places have survived… it's so sad.

YOUR LETTER IN PRINT We reserve the right to edit any letters sent to the magazine. Messages posted to our Facebook wall and tweets sent to us may also appear in print. The choice of Star Letter is the editor's and the prize is subject to change.

ourmedia

Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine is published by Our Media Limited

Issue 226 – January 2025

Editorial
Editor Sarah Williams
Production editor Seth Burgess
Features editor Rosemary Collins
Art editor Robbie Bennie

Advertising Sales
Advertising manager Andy Williams
0117 300 8803
Inserts Laurence Robertson
00 353 876 902208

Marketing
Head of loyalty, CRM and retention Rosa Sherwood
Subscriptions marketing coordinator Dennis Awdziejczyk

Press And PR
Head of PR Dominic Lobley

Content Operations
Director Sarah Powell
Senior content operations coordinator Holly Donmall
Ad design Camilla Owen
Senior ad coordinator Charles Thurlow

Subscriptions And Back Issues
t 03330 162120*
w **ourmediashop.com/contactus**
or write to *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*, PO Box 3320, 3 Queensbridge, Northampton, UK
Basic annual subscription rates:
UK £74.75, Eire & Europe €70, ROW $75

Syndication & Licensing
Director of licensing & syndication Tim Hudson
Magazine syndication executive Emma Brunt

Our Media Ltd
Brand lead Rob Brock
Chief executive officer Andy Marshall

Wall To Wall Media Ltd
Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine is produced under licence from Wall to Wall Media Ltd. Wall to Wall Media Ltd is part of Shed Media, PLC and is one of the world's leading producers of factual and drama programming. Wall to Wall is the producer of the multi-award winning television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* The series is committed to reducing its carbon emissions and has signed up to 10:10 (**www.1010global.org**). This has involved hiring more local crews and taking fewer flights while continuing to make a series that goes to wherever the story leads. Visit **www.walltowall.co.uk** for more information.

© Our Media Ltd 2025

ISSN: 1755-7690
Printed by William Gibbons Ltd.

We abide by IPSO's rules and regulations. To give feedback about our magazines, please visit **ourmedia.co.uk**, email *editorialcomplaints@ourmedia.co.uk*, or write to Legal, Our Media Ltd, Eagle House, Bristol, BS1 4ST.

Our Media Company is working to ensure that all of its paper comes from well-managed, Forest Stewardship Council-certified forests and other controlled sources. This magazine is printed on FSC-certified paper. It can be recycled for use in newspapers and packaging. Please remove any gifts, samples or wrapping and dispose of them at your local collection point.

*UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed-line numbers (starting 01 or 02) and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff). Outside of free call packages call charges from mobile phones will cost between 3p and 55p per minute. Lines are open Monday to Friday 9am–5pm. Overseas subscribers call +44 1604 973728.

What's On

Email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk* to feature your event here for free

PICK OF THE MONTH

Begin your research with this course

Stage 1 Family History Skills Course With Expert Tutors

Starts 11 January
w **tinyurl.com/sog-stage-1**

Get expert tuition from the Society of Genealogists

This 12-week course from the Society of Genealogists, delivered over Zoom, promises to teach you everything you need to know about beginning your family history research, and equip you with the correct techniques right at the start of your journey into the hobby. A range of tutors will cover basic record sets including civil registration records, census returns, parish records, old newspapers, electoral records, wills, army and Merchant Navy records, records of the poor and nonconformist records, and explain the sleuthing skills you need so that you can explore your roots further. There will also be the opportunity to put your questions to the experts during question-and-answer sessions. £267 for non-members with a three-month trial membership included.

IN PERSON

Studying The 3 Rs

8 January
a **Sale Moor Community Centre**
w **fhsc.org.uk/events**
Claire Moores explains how school and education records can help your family history research. £2 for members of the Family History Society of Cheshire, £2.50 for non-members.

The 800 Year History & Family Continuity Of Salisbury Marketplace Businesses

9 January
a **Wilton Community Centre**
t 07533 267546
w **wiltshirefhs.co.uk/salisbury-branch**
Geoff Lang presents this local-history talk from Wiltshire Family History Society. Free.

Fire! A Century Of The Volunteer Fire Brigade With Jo Livingston

11 January
a **Dartford Science and Technology College**
t 01322 527604
w **tinyurl.com/nwkfhs-fire**
Jo Livingston reveals the history of Dartford's volunteer fire brigade, with which her family has had a long association. Free to North West Kent Family History Society members, non-members asked to make a small donation.

IN PERSON AND ONLINE

The Town That Vanished

8 January
a **Great Lever & Farnworth Golf Club, Bolton**
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-bolton-van**
Bolton historian Ian Robinson will tell the story of how the Mass Observation project created a remarkable record of the town between 1937 and 1940. Free to members of Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society, £5 for non-members.

My Father, Sculptor Oscar Nemon

15 January
a **The Wiener Holocaust Library, London**
t 020 7636 7247
w **tinyurl.com/wiener-nemon**
Aurelia Young will talk about her father, the Holocaust refugee and sculptor Oscar Nemon. Free.

ONLINE

Pharos Tutors

Various dates
w **pharostutors.com/courses**
Upcoming courses from Pharos Tutors include 'Introduction to Medieval Genealogy' (starts 6 January, five weeks, Gillian Waters), 'Researching Online for Advanced Genealogists' (begins 7 January, four weeks, Else Churchill), '17th Century Sources' (starts 15 January, four weeks, Stuart Raymond) and 'Advanced Military Research – 20th Century Conflict' (begins 20 January, three weeks, Simon Fowler). See the website for pricing.

The National Archives

Various dates
w **tinyurl.com/tna-on-events**
Upcoming webinars from TNA include 'Using Discovery, The National Archives' Online Catalogue' (4 January), 'Researching Your Local History' (11 January), 'Researching Your Family History: Wills' (18 January) and 'Researching Your Family History: 20th Century Sources' (25 January). Free.

Escaping Hitler – A Jewish Boy's Quest for Freedom

8 January
w **tinyurl.com/berksfhs-stern**
Phyllida Scrivens shares the story of Günter Stern (later known as Joe Stirling) who came to Britain as a Kindertransport refugee and became sheriff of Norwich, in this webinar from Berkshire Family History Society. £5.

Oliver House: The Story Of A 16th Century Cottage

15 January
w **tinyurl.com/surreycc-pettyfer**
This Surrey Heritage event sees Sarah Pettyfer uncover the history of a building in Cranleigh. £6.

Land, Family And Economic Life In Two Nineteenth-Century Tiree Townships

17 January
w **tinyurl.com/slhf-warde**
Paul Warde discusses the Balinoe and Balemartine townships in this webinar. Free to Friends of the Argyll Papers, otherwise £10.

The Lost Prisons Of Barnstaple

17 January
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-ayre**
This South West Heritage Trust talk on Barnstaple's vanished prison buildings will be given by North Devon Athenaeum librarian Naomi Ayre. £5.

East Surrey Family History Society Virtual Family History Fair

25 January
w **eastsurreyfhs.org.uk/index.php/event**
Don't miss the chance to connect with a variety of family history societies online. Free.

BOOK AHEAD

The Family History Show Online returns

The Family History Show Online

8 February
w **thefamilyhistoryshow.com/online/**
The latest online event from The Family History Show takes place in February. Enjoy talks, one-to-one ask-the-experts sessions with the likes of Nick Barratt, and a virtual exhibition hall – all from the comfort of your own home. £7 in advance, £10 on the day.

News

Rosemary Collins reports on the latest data releases and genealogy news

£8.7 million Staffordshire History Centre opens

Left to right: Mithra Tonking, Staffordshire County Council's head of archives and heritage Joanna Terry, Julian Glover and Victoria Wilson

A new £8.7 million heritage centre for Staffordshire's historic archives opened on 6 November.

The Staffordshire History Centre is located on Eastgate Street in Stafford.

Staffordshire County Council said that the centre has "modern search and learning rooms, strongrooms capable of holding up to a further 50 years of archives, and a bright exhibition space for displays and temporary exhibitions".

Victoria Wilson, cabinet member for communities and culture at the council, commented, "We're all incredibly excited about the new centre that will allow us to preserve our amazing collections while our outreach activities will help us reach local communities and schools and get many more people excited about our history."

The centre was built next to the William Salt Library, which has been restored and become part of the centre.

The library was founded by William Salt (1808–1863), a wealthy banker who established a significant collection of genealogical and topographical books and manuscripts about the history of Staffordshire and artwork of the county.

Mithra Tonking, chair of the William Salt Library, said, "Thanks to this fantastic project, the heritage William Salt Library building, which is owned by a charitable trust, has been restored to new uses. It will also tell the history of the much-loved building within Stafford's past, and showcase the unique William Salt Library collection.

"This important and varied collection about Staffordshire's history will now be stored within the new strongrooms at the history centre and will be readily available to researchers, after a major cataloguing programme."

The centre combines the library's collections with those of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire County Museum.

It is open Tuesday to Saturday 10am–4pm, and is free to visit. Visits to the archives must be booked in advance.

Items on display in the centre include a spider phaeton carriage from 1890; a silk nightcap from the 1630s that belonged to Charles I and was given to the Royalist Bagot family of Blithfield Hall; an 18th-century notebook belonging to engineer James Brindley, famous for his contribution to building Britain's canal network; and the will of Wulfric Spot, which is over 1,000 years old and confirms a grant of land on which Burton Abbey was founded.

Simultaneously, Staffordshire History Centre's new website was launched, located at **www.staffordshirehistory.org.uk**.

The centre was funded with the help of a £4.8 million grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Julian Glover, trustee and chair of the fund's England, Midlands & East Committee, was one of the people who attended the opening. He said, "Thanks to National Lottery players, state-of-the-art archive and collection facilities will ensure that communities and visitors of all ages can delve deep into Staffordshire's fascinating past."

STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

NEWS IN BRIEF

One of the digitised draft cards

Fold3 adds first batch of US Korean War records

US military records website Fold3 (**fold3.com**) has begun digitising draft registration cards from the Korean War era, covering 1948–1959. A total of 57,453 cards from Alaska and Wyoming have been added. Fold3 plans to digitise all 10 million records, which are held by the US National Archives. The cards include each soldier's address, date and place of birth, name of contact person, occupation, employer and physical appearance.

The Navy List for January 1929

TheGenealogist releases 500,000 military records

Family history site TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) has added 500,000 military records to mark Remembrance Day on 11 November. They come from the indexing of volumes including *Naval and Military Despatches Vol. IV–VI* (1915–1916); *The British Roll of Honour 1837–1887*; *Return of the Names of the Officers in the Army 1811–1816*; *Surrey Musters, Parts I–III* (1544–1684); the Army List for September 1933; and the Navy List for January 1929.

The commemoration ceremony at Venray

Leeds Library researchers find photos of WW2 servicemen

Photographs of three Leeds soldiers killed during the Second World War and laid to rest in a cemetery in the Netherlands have been placed before their graves thanks to researchers in their home city.

The men – Lance Corporal Herbert Alan Young, Private John Keddie and sapper Walter Marshall – are buried at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Venray War Cemetery in Limburg. Young and Marshall died in 1944, and Keddie in 1945.

Every autumn, residents of Venray 'adopt' a soldier, placing candles, flowers and photographs to represent the families in the UK who are not able to visit.

The Stichting Adoptiegraven Foundation contacted the Leeds Local and Family History Library at Leeds Central Library (**libraries.leeds.gov.uk/what-you-can-do/local-and-family-history**) to request help identifying photographs of the men.

Staff at the library found photos of the men in local newspapers, which were laid at their graves as part of a commemoration ceremony to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Venray on 13 October.

Rhian Isaac, senior librarian at Leeds Central Library, said, "It's been wonderful to be able to help the research team in Venray, and to play our part in making sure our fallen servicemen could be properly honoured and their sacrifice remembered."

CAN YOU HELP?

Spitfire AA810 in service with the PRU, 1942

Relatives of men who served in the Royal Air Force's secretive Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) during the Second World War are being encouraged to get in touch with the team behind the Spitfire AA810 Project, who have launched a national campaign to build a monument honouring their service. Providing essential wartime aerial-reconnaissance images gathered by pilots flying arduous and solitary missions in unarmed Spitfires and Mosquitos, proportionately the unit suffered the highest mortality rate out of the RAF's branches during the war. Anyone who is related to those who served or who may have information about personnel involved with the PRU is asked to contact Tony Hoskins by emailing *tony@spitfireaa810.co.uk*. A list of known PRU personnel can be viewed on the project's website at **spitfireaa810.co.uk/for-those-who-served**.

LEEDS CITY COUNCIL / SPITFIRE AA810 PROJECT

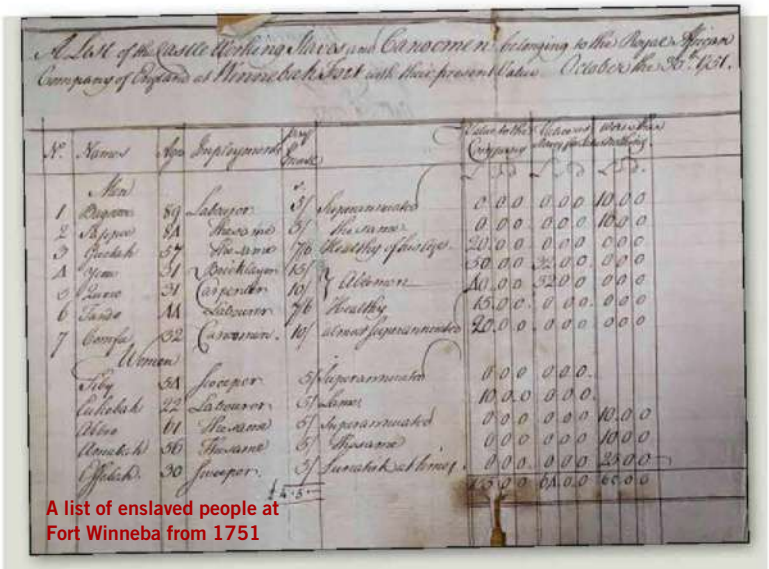
IHGS's site has details of the courses, authored by genealogist Dr Sophie Kay

Genetic genealogy courses announced

The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies (IHGS) is launching two new courses in genetic genealogy. The courses are 'Intermediate Certificate in DNA & Genetic Genealogy', described as "a six-module qualification covering themes including: autosomal, mitochondrial, X– and Y-DNA; analysis and problem solving methods for genetic genealogy; ethics and best practice; and the history of genetics", and 'Advanced Certificate in DNA & Genetic Genealogy', which is open to those who have completed the intermediate course and will require them to design, deliver and report a research project.

The courses will be taught in a self-paced, distance-learning format, and start in late spring 2025. The prices have not yet been specified, and students will need to test with AncestryDNA (**ancestry.co.uk/dna**).

To register an interest, visit **ihgs.ac.uk/dna-and-genetic-genealogy-2032**.



A list of enslaved people at Fort Winneba from 1751

The National Archives adds slavery records to its catalogue

The National Archives at Kew has listed 8,035 documents relating to the Royal African Company (RAC) on its online catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**). The RAC was established in 1660, and in 1752 its assets were transferred to the newly formed Company of Merchants Trading to Africa, which lasted until 1821. It was responsible for transporting thousands of enslaved people every year from Africa to the Americas.

The records are from a set of documents called the Detached Papers and include lists of 'castle slaves' in British forts, as well as RAC correspondence.

354
The number of pieces of graffiti by prisoners at the Tower of London that have been uncovered by new technology (**tinyurl.com/guardian-graff**)

1894
The family history website **familysearch.org** has celebrated its founding 130 years ago as the Genealogical Society of Utah

2.5 million
The total number of Kent parish records that have been added to **thegenealogist.co.uk**

Suffolk Regiment Museum
The museum's archives have been allowed to remain in Bury St Edmunds after the branch of Suffolk Archives in the town closed (**tinyurl.com/suffolk-news-srm**)

4
The number of British soldiers killed in the Korean War and buried in unknown graves who have now been identified (**tinyurl.com/bbc-korean-ident**)

One of the illustrations in Henry Page's sketchbooks, which are on Findmypast

Artist's First World War sketchbooks go online

An artist's cartoons of life fighting in the First World War, plus his decorated love letters, have been published online by family history website Findmypast (findmypast.co.uk).

The firm has digitised Private Henry Page's two sketchbooks, which were found at Southwark Archives (**southwark.gov.uk/culture-and-sport/local-history-and-heritage/southwark-archives**).

Henry joined the Army as a volunteer in 1915. After a year on home service with the Walworth TA Unit, 24th London Regiment, he was sent to France where he served six months.

In early December 1916, the 2/24 set off for Salonika in Greece, where Henry spent another six months. In June 1917, he was shipped to Alexandria, Egypt. At one point he caught typhoid fever, and spent 16 weeks in hospital.

The illustrations depict day-to-day life in the Army. They include cartoons of soldiers and drawings of the Alexandria streets and people.

Henry also added illustrations to the envelopes holding letters he sent home to his sweetheart, Edith Pedley. They married after the war and the 1939 Register shows them living together in Luton, with Henry's profession listed as "commercial artist".

The collection is at **search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/first-world-war-sketchbook.**

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES / FINDMYPAST

Remembering Auntie Betty

Alan Crosby reflects on the rich life of a well-travelled and much-missed relation

My aunt died in early September. She was my mum's younger sister, 96 years old, and she had lived in Germany and then Canada since she married in 1954. Auntie Betty was a wonderful person, and we all loved her dearly, even though we rarely saw her. Her story touches on all sorts of key themes in family history, and I thought about her frequently. Until a couple of years ago, when like so many people at that advanced age she succumbed to memory loss and dementia, Betty and I would enjoy long and hilarious phone calls, updating each other with family happenings.

She met her husband, to whom she was married for almost 70 years, at a family 'do' in Manchester in 1952. It was to celebrate the engagement of her cousin Joyce to Joe, and among the people who came along was Joe's cousin Wesley, a Canadian soldier serving in West Germany. He had been allowed a short leave to see his cousins and other relatives in England. Wesley was tall, dark and handsome, and she was petite and very pretty. It was love at first sight. His forebears came from the Bristol area, but he himself was born in a tiny town far out in the limitless prairie of Saskatchewan. Back to Western Canada he would go, and Betty would of course go with him.

No more will I learn all her stories about her grandchildren's goings-on

My grandmother was appalled – I doubt that Grandad was all that bothered, but Grandma wept and wailed at the prospect of her little girl leaving to go so far away, and she was absolutely convinced that they would never see each other again. It was all to no avail – Betty and Wesley were married, and duly went to live in West Germany for a short while before moving to Calgary when he left the army.

One reason for Grandma's alarm about the move to Canada was that Betty was generally considered to be 'delicate'. As a small child she'd suffered from several rather unspecific conditions, was said to have had heart attacks, and missed a lot of schooling (her handwriting and spelling were highly idiosyncratic for the rest of her life). This contrasted sharply with her brother, my uncle Alan, who was sporty and six feet tall at the age of 15, and with my mother, who was a robust and healthy child. Betty was the youngest of the three, and Grandma expected her to stay at home. Ironically, the fragile and delicate child outlived the whole lot of them – she was the oldest person ever in my maternal family.

Of course, her departure for Canada was not the last they saw of her. Within a few years there was good-quality phone communication between Britain and Western Canada, and soon after that came regular and increasingly affordable air links. Not only did Betty and Wesley come to visit us, bringing their three children, my exotic Canadian cousins, but (almost miraculously) Grandma and Grandad even went out to the Rockies to visit them. For Grandma, brought up in a poor area of inner-city Manchester in the Edwardian period, when a motor car was a very rare novelty, to fly across the world to Calgary was simply astonishing. There were the photographs to prove it – Grandma wearing a Stetson, watching the Calgary Stampede, and Grandad, clad in a colourful shirt, gazing at the awe-inspiring view of the glaciers across Lake Louise.

And now she is gone, and only in my mind will I hear her amazing and surely unique accent – broadest Mancunian mixed with distinctive Western Canadian. No more will I learn all her wonderful stories about her grandchildren's dubious goings-on, or the eccentricity of Wesley's sisters ("It's because they're from Saskatchewan, eh?").

There's something else, too: Auntie Betty was the last of her generation. Now my cousins and I are the old folks, but it seems like only yesterday that we were the children.

ALAN CROSBY lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM

50 WEBSITES TO WATCH 2025

Jonathan Scott looks ahead and reveals the unmissable online resources for 2025

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly affecting all our lives, and our favourite hobby is no exception. Indeed, it feels like we're at a tipping point when it comes to family history. Traditional transcription projects, where arduous legwork is carried out by volunteers, have been slowly disappearing. As machines get better at indexing and reading old handwriting, increasingly volunteers are being called upon to check and improve the data they harvest, rather than compile it from scratch. And machines that can read handwriting begin to do away with the need for an index in the first place. FamilySearch's Full Text Search tool allows you to search collections that haven't been indexed, simply by reading the writing on the image.

As is always the case with our annual preview, old friends like TheGenealogist, Findmypast and Ancestry are balancing the desire to whet readers' appetites with the need to keep commercial secrets. So expect more news to be announced around RootsTech, which takes place in Salt Lake City, Utah, and online on 6–8 March.

We might also expect new releases and perhaps even periods of free access coinciding with VE Day on 8 May to mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

GETTY IMAGES

Ancestry

w **ancestry.co.uk**

Ancestry promises a bumper year with half a billion new records in 2025 including the much-anticipated 1921 census coming in the first half of the year and a second tranche of service records from the Second World War. Watch for multiple UK parish sets, including Berkshire's parish registers with a possible launch in late 2025 or early 2026. There will also be new and updated electoral registers, death indexes (1989–2024), poorhouse records and Second World War audio files.

British History Online

w **www.british-history.ac.uk/**

The Victoria County History launched in 1899 as a project to compile a history of every county in England, producing numerous volumes in the 'Big Red Book' series. Many have already been digitised, and from 2025 nearly 100 more will begin to be made freely available via BHO. The project is focusing on digitising the earliest volumes, as well as more recent ones that focus on specific places.

British Newspaper Archive

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

Staff are expecting to add many millions of pages this coming year, concentrating on "regional storytelling, special interest titles, and perspectives from across the Commonwealth".

Civil War Bluejackets

w **zooniverse.org/projects/bluejackets/civil-war-bluejackets**

Here you can contribute to a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded initiative to tell the story of common US sailors in the American Civil War. Phase one saw volunteers transcribe records to support and train AI to read the 19th-century handwriting. They've now entered the second phase: checking its transcriptions.

Coram Story

w **coramstory.org.uk/the-foundling-hospital-archive/**

The children's charity Coram has completed a five-year National Lottery Heritage Fund programme with the launch of the online Foundling Hospital Archive, containing details of more than 20,000 children cared for by London's Foundling Hospital.

FamilySearch

w **familysearch.org**

The site will continue to roll out AI tools in the coming months. This should mean that volunteers are checking and correcting data that AI has produced, rather than having to work from scratch. Via FamilySearch Labs you can road-test experimental gizmos such as AI-assisted search or the Full Text Search. You can also improve the AI's work via the Get Involved facility. Look out too for enhancements to the website's existing mobile apps, and a new app that is designed to help tell individual or family stories.

Findmypast

w **findmypast.co.uk**

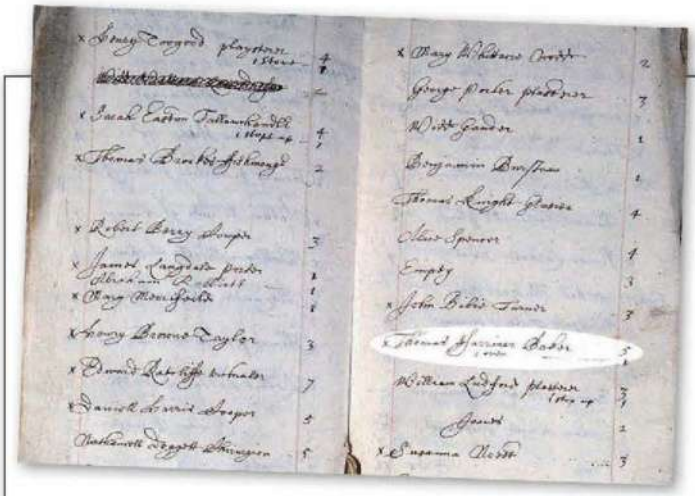
Spring brings us an exclusive Guernsey collection, including parish records and Second World War occupation cards, plus women's military service records. There will be more parish records from Shropshire, Canterbury, Southwark, Surrey, Ireland and Manchester; regular additions of naval records; and updates to education records, trade directories, military journals and British Home Children material. Finally incoming passenger lists from the USA that are held by TNA will arrive in February.

GETTY IMAGES

FreeBMD

w **freebmd.org.uk**

The largest and longest-running of the three Free UK Genealogy websites is gearing up for a new set of clothes in 2025. The team are currently completing a thorough round of testing, to make sure that the new version of the website, which will be more in line with its siblings FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**) and FreeCEN (**freecen.org.uk**), can stand up to the rigours of more than 60,000 users per week. The results table will be enhanced and the records section will go into further detail, for example providing information about districts.



Hearth Tax Digital

w **https://gams.uni-graz.at/context:htx**

The launch of assessments for Lancashire and Wiltshire increased the total number of Restoration England households covered here to approximately 320,000. The expectation is that by 2026 there will be data on 400,000–500,000. Next up are the Hertfordshire returns, which for the first time will include photographs alongside the transcripts. These will be followed by collections for North Riding of Yorkshire and Northumberland.

Humap

w **https://humap.me/**

During 2024 this interactive map platform for "geospatial storytelling" launched several projects including Unlocking North East Jewish Heritage (**unejh.humap.site**) and 100 Years of Mile Cross relating to a housing estate in Norwich (**100yearsofmilecross.humap.site**). More projects are promised in 2025.

Museum Of Scottish Railways

w **museumofscottishrailways.org.uk/collections/**

The museum is located in Bo'ness on the Firth of Forth. Its project on the hidden history of women and railway culture, based on a family archive, won a TownsWeb Archiving grant in August. It looks set to reveal "the social role of women on Scotland's railways" in the mid-20th century.

National Burial Grounds Survey

w **agintl.org/nbgs-survey/**

This long-running project to survey and accurately map all Church of England churchyards in England is slowly gathering pace. We're told that the first completed diocese will be launched in 2025.

WW2

With the 80th anniversary of the end of the war, there's lots coming online

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

w **cwgc.org/stories**

The commission is developing tools to help visitors explore the 5,000 (and counting) stories shared on its online platform For Evermore, and continuing its Legacy of Liberation campaign in the build-up to the 80th anniversary of VE and VJ Day.

Forces War Records

w **uk.forceswarrecords.com**

The first tranche of Second World War Medal Index Cards and service records arrived in November, so watch out for a second instalment in 2025.

National Archives Of Australia

w **https://www.naa.gov.au/**

The five-year project to digitise more than one million service records from the Second World War has ended. Virtually all are now available via the collection database RecordSearch, joining the First World War records.

Their Finest Hour

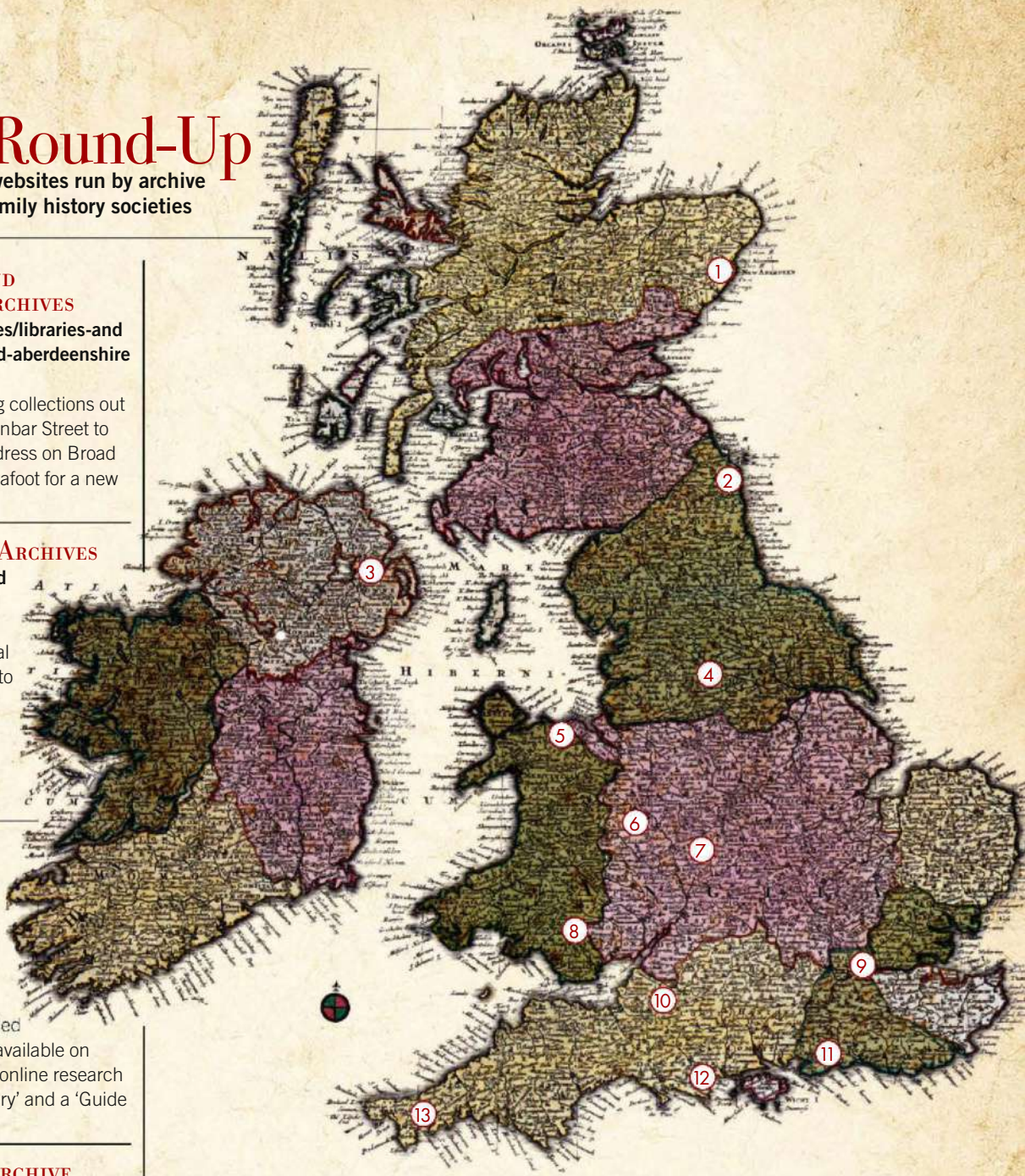
w **theirfinesthour.english.ox.ac.uk**

This recently launched free online archive is home to about 25,000 objects and 2,000 stories of ordinary people's experiences in the Second World War, the output of a two-year Oxford University project.

GETTY IMAGES

Regional Round-Up

The latest news from 13 websites run by archive services, museums and family history societies



1 Aberdeen City And Aberdeenshire Archives

w **aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/libraries-and-archives/aberdeen-city-and-aberdeenshire-archives**

The team are currently moving collections out of Old Aberdeen House on Dunbar Street to reopen at the Town House address on Broad Street in the spring. Plans are afoot for a new archive building in the future.

2 Northumberland Archives

w **https://northumberlandarchives.com/manorial-project/**

Staff are finishing off a National Lottery Heritage Fund project to transcribe manorial records from across the county. They are currently working on mounting the transcripts together with digitised scans.

3 Public Record Office Of Northern Ireland

w **nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-proni-historical-maps-viewer**

An additional dataset of places of worship is being added to the Historical Maps viewer available on PRONI's website, joining new online research guides such as 'Ulster & Slavery' and a 'Guide to Sports Records'.

4 West Yorkshire Archive Service

w **wyjs.org.uk/archive-service/**

Tithe maps and apportionments for Bradford and Leeds have been added to the new digital portal, and transcripts of diarist Anne Lister's travel journals are incoming.

5 North East Wales Archives

w **www.newa.wales/**

The recently launched *Acid Free* is a digital series that explores people, stories and themes from the collections. Memorial cards detailing locals who served in the First World War are also in the pipeline.

6 Shropshire Family History Society

w **www.sfhs.org.uk**

The website will be relaunched in 2025.

7 Birmingham Museums

w **birminghammuseums.org.uk/about/what-we-do/dynamic-collections/documentation-detectives**

This Zooniverse project transcribing accession registers is very nearly complete.

8 Gwent Archives

w **gwentarchives.gov.uk**

A team of volunteers have been transcribing petty-session and burial registers. By March 2025 staff expect 44 volumes to be available.

9 Bethnal Green Roll Of Honour

w **https://www.ideastore.co.uk/local-history/collections-and-digital-resources/archives-online/bethnal-green-roll-of-honour**

Tower Hamlets' archive service has uploaded this Second World War Roll of Honour.

10 Bath Record Office

w **batharchives.co.uk**

A combined catalogue for archives and local-studies material is due by the end of 2024, so both will be searchable from one platform.

11 West Sussex Record Office

w **wsro.org.uk**

The archive service created a new standalone website and catalogue in June; thousands of images are already available. Staff are also planning to add more research guides.

12 Dorset Family History Society

w **dorsetfhs.org.uk**

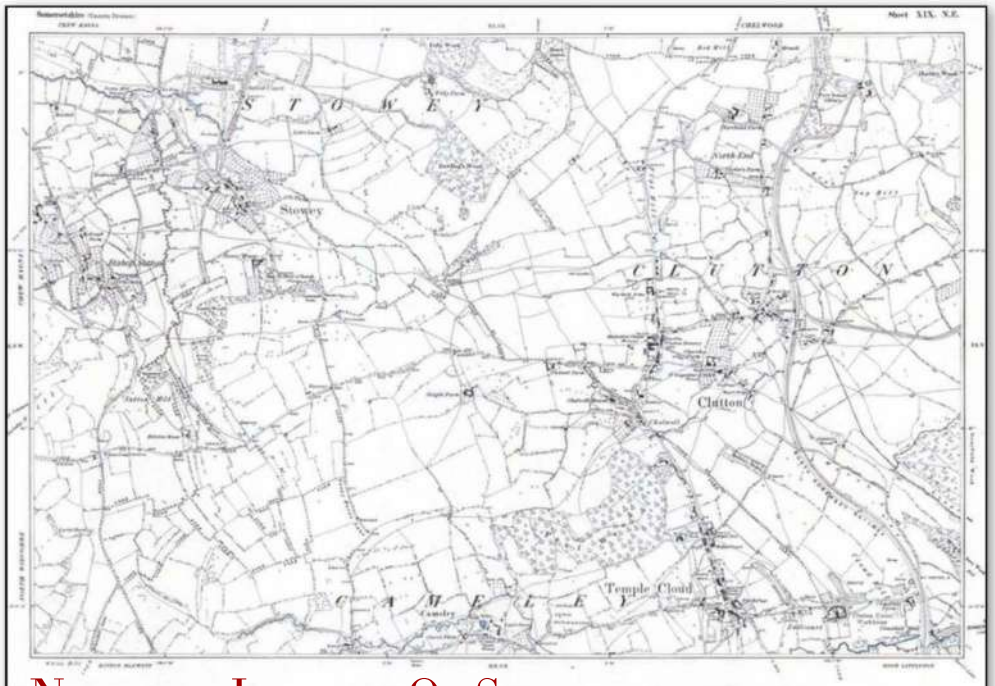
This website will also get a refresh in 2025.

13 Cornwall Family History Society

w **www.cornwallfhs.com**

Nonconformist baptisms have been added – and, after the society's move to new premises in Truro, the website will be relaunched.

GETTY IMAGES



National Library Of Scotland

w **nls.uk**

The library continues to focus on publishing 19th- and 20th-century maps of England and Wales via **maps.nls.uk**. By early 2025 all of the Ordnance Survey 'Old Series' sheets (one-inch to the mile) should be available. Dating from the early 1800s through to the 1860s, these give an overview of the landscape, including smaller villages, farms and hamlets, prior to the more detailed six-inch maps. NLS also expects to add about 6,000 maps from commercial mapmakers.

National Library Of Wales

w **library.wales**

The focus next year is to complete the crowdsourced transcription of the Welsh Women's Peace Petition, signed by 390,296 women in 1923, and add the data to a search interface that launched in September (**peace petition.library.wales**). Staff hope that it will be complete by the end of 2025.

Newspapers.com

w **newspapers.com**

In 2025 the website is continuing to expand local titles for England, Wales, Ireland, Australia, Canada and the USA. We're told that Irish newspapers in particular will see a "substantial increase".

Royal Berkshire Archives

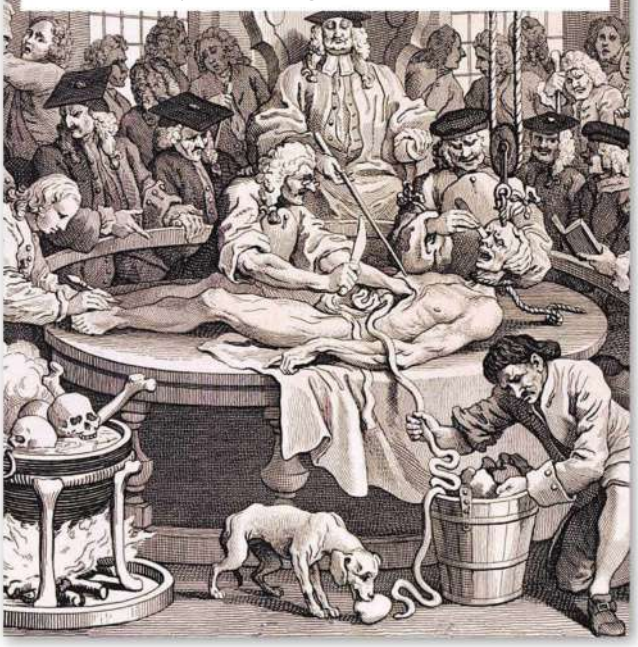
w **berksrecords.access.preservica.com/**

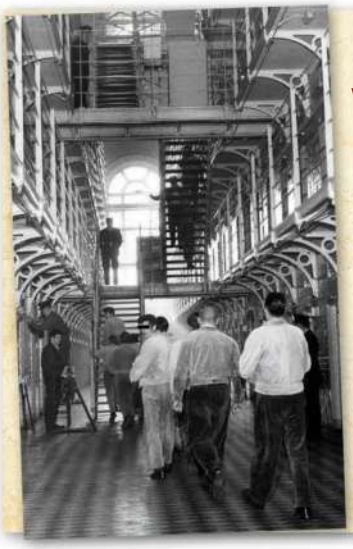
In 2024 the archive built this repository for records received in digital format, alongside digitised copies of some paper-based records. The catalogue is also getting a mobile-friendly facelift, due to be ready by the start of 2025.

Royal College Of Surgeons Of England

w **rcseng.ac.uk/library-and-publications/library/discover-our-collections/**

The college won a TownsWeb Archiving grant in August 2024 for a project digitising 18th-century female patient records, and a petition calling for it to admit women.





Scotland's People

w **scotlandspeople.gov.uk**

Alongside additions to record sets that are already online, the website is planning some "unusual and interesting" releases in 2025. In January we'll see the traditional annual register updates – 1924 birth entries, 1949 marriages and 1974 deaths. Plus staff will be adding material to the Scottish Women's Land Army and Women's Timber Corps collections, joining the 180,000-plus records from Barlinnie Prison in Glasgow that were added in October.

Scottish Indexes

w **https://www.scottishindexes.com**

In 2025 the team are continuing to index victims and witnesses to cases heard at the sheriff courts, concentrating on the 1750s to c1900. Additionally, they are indexing records of inmates from various Scottish prisons, aiming to reach a milestone of 700,000 prison-record entries by the end of 2025. In January the National Records of Scotland will be releasing another volume of mental-health records, covering 1921–1924, and the site will index them as soon as possible.

GETTY IMAGES

Ireland

If you have Irish roots, these websites will give you plenty to celebrate

Ireland Genealogy Projects

w **igp-web.com**

This free site has 7,000 photos from contributors waiting to be added to its Archives portal, including headstones from the counties Carlow, Cavan, Kerry, Kilkenny, Limerick and Wexford.

National Archives Of Ireland

w **nationalarchives.ie**

As we went to press the archive's website was in the middle of a redesign, with the ambition to launch in early December. Also the 1926 census, being digitised in partnership with the Central Statistics Office, is due in 2026.

The Irish Great War Dead Archive

w **irelandsgreatwardead.ie**

Military historian Tom Burnell is adding details of all those who served and died between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921 – the same dates used by the CWGC – no matter what they died from. He is also revisiting those who have no next of kin listed in the database, and adding new information from recently available pension cards.

Virtual Record Treasury Of Ireland

w **virtualtreasury.ie**

A new Irish population portal (1766–1891) is set to arrive in June, bringing together all surviving population records back to the 1766 religious census. Thousands more editions of the *Dublin Gazette* will be released too, and 18th-century property records from the Registry of Deeds at Tailte Éireann naming buyers and sellers.

Society Of Genealogists

w **sog.org.uk**

An 'A-to-Z of Records' function is coming to SoG Explore, an online database for members of the society, in early 2025. Also watch out for more content generated by the society's free online event All About That Place. You can view talks from 2024's offering via **youtube.com/@SocietyofGenealogists**.

Surrey Heritage

w **surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/history-centre**

New datasets are in the pipeline at the Surrey History Centre. Staff uploaded Royal Philanthropic School indexes (1906–1921) in October, taken from registers of admissions which give wonderfully detailed accounts, sometimes with photos. These join 1788–1906 indexes completed a few years ago. Patient indexes for various mental-health hospitals are due to be uploaded soon.

Southampton Archives

w **southampton.gov.uk/libraries/southampton-archives/**

As part of a website revamp, a new digital catalogue allows users to view documents, photographs, maps, charters and oral history recordings. Staff are also adding research guides on the Merchant Navy, education, health, motor vehicles, oral history and photos. Cataloguing and guide writing are both ongoing projects, so expect new material to arrive regularly during 2025.

TheGenealogist

w **thegenealogist.co.uk**

Highlights next year include probate records in partnership with TNA. The organisations are also teaming up for the collections 'Early Prisoner of War Records (1755–1831)' and 'Royal Hospital Chelsea: Prize Records'. Other material in the wings includes casualty lists; lists from the Army, Navy and RAF; land records and maps; and more parish records.

The London Archives

w **thelondonarchives.org**

The former London Metropolitan Archives dropped the "Metropolitan" in the summer, and has overhauled its website with many more excerpts from the vaults. Staff promise more research guides and stories from its collections in 2025, and are working with Ancestry to add more content to the parish register and electoral register databases in the first half of the year.

GETTY IMAGES

The Long, Long Trail

w **longlongtrail.co.uk**

Chris Baker, the creator of this essential site for the First World War, hopes to expand the information concerning the British heavy and siege artillery manned by the Royal Garrison Artillery. There will be updates to research advice as new digitised sources continue to become available, and he's planning a range of 'how to' videos.

The Material Culture Of Wills: England 1540–1790

w **zooniverse.org/projects/hjsmith/the-material-culture-of-wills-england-1540-1790**

This four-year research project seeks to understand how attitudes towards material objects changed between the 16th and 18th centuries. It launched on 15 October, and by midday on 7 November volunteers had checked 103,721 lines of text and transcribed a further 19,104 from scratch.

The National Archives

w **nationalarchives.gov.uk**

Watch for news of the project to digitise and transcribe the National Farm Survey from the Second World War, containing data on more than 300,000 English and Welsh farms. The material will eventually be released via TNA's catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**), with the aim to make it permanently and freely available. Early in 2024 TNA also announced a contract to digitise, transcribe and publish the four million records of the Home Guard; also collaborations with TheGenealogist are on the way.

The Ogilby Trust

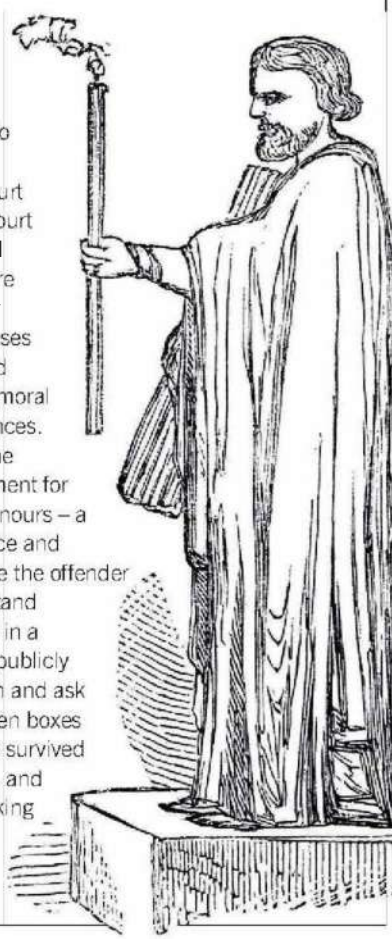
w **armymuseums.org.uk/the-ogilby-muster/**

The launch of the trust's Ogilby Muster saw regimental archives' First World War records go online. The digital files have now been transferred to the archives that supplied the hard copies; visit the site's Museum Directory to see how the material is being put to use.

University Of Nottingham Special Collections

w **nottingham.ac.uk/manuscripts andspecial collections/**

In 2025 the university hopes to finish cataloguing Archdeaconry Court penances. This court covered almost all of Nottinghamshire and, among other matters, heard cases of people who had been accused of moral and spiritual offences. A penance was the standard punishment for sexual misdemeanours – a ritual of repentance and humiliation, where the offender was required to stand barefoot, dressed in a white sheet, and publicly renounce their sin and ask forgiveness. Sixteen boxes of penances have survived from 1590–1794, and staff are now working through the final bundle dating from the 1590s.



GETTY IMAGES

THE GAZETTE
OFFICIAL PUBLIC RECORD

FIND YOUR ANCESTORS IN THE GAZETTE

- ✓ **Free to search** and create an account
- ✓ Trusted official public record, dating back to 1665
- ✓ Thousands of **military awards and promotions**, including WW1 zone
- ✓ Deceased estates notices
- ✓ Company and personal insolvency notices

OPEN A **FREE** ACCOUNT AND GET STARTED

The Gazette is on

Start your **free** search at
www.**thegazette**.co.uk

WHO
DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®

TRY A ONE MONTH

FREE TRIAL

To the digital edition

Tap here for your **FREE TRIAL**

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google play

If you love family history, then why not have *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*, the UK's best-selling family history magazine publication, delivered straight to your computer, tablet or smartphone? With a digital subscription to *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* you can enjoy our easy-to-follow advice and news of the latest online releases wherever you are.

Have *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* Delivered Straight To Your Device

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google play

Simply Tap The Logo Below To Try A Free Trial To The Digital Edition

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

'My Family Tree Is Packed With Sporting Heroes'

Kim Thompson has uncovered several champions among her relations including amazing women who blazed trails in tennis and Alaskan dog sledding, she told **Claire Vaughan**

Tennis, boxing, dog sledding, Kim Thompson's relatives have excelled at them all – and had the trophies to prove it. As well as making names for themselves, they pushed the boundaries in their chosen sports, with one now celebrated with a day named after her while another revolutionised the way that tennis is played. However, before Kim could uncover these incredible achievements, there was a very high brick wall she had to scale – and the eventual solution was so bizarre, you'd think it was fiction.

Kim's grandfather Walter Albert Baker, known as 'Bert', had an impressive career as a boxer

"I first started researching my family history back in 2009," says Kim. "I joined my older sister and my uncle in their research on our paternal line. Mum's side had always been a bit of a mystery. She was brought up not to ask questions."

Kim managed to fill in the blanks about her mother's parents, Walter Baker and Maud Chamberlain, but struggled to get beyond them. "My grandmother was orphaned as a child so she barely knew her parents, and my grandad had moved up to Leeds from London as a young adult and never spoke about his family." Kim checked the 1939 Register and other records to see if she could locate her grandfather's parents. "I found Walter and his siblings. His father seemed to change his forenames from record to record. Quite early on, I realised that something didn't add up."

It took her several years to get to the bottom of it. In the 1911 census, her great grandfather was calling himself Alfred Baker and claiming he was born in Norwich. He was living with Kim's great grandmother, Catherine Hanson, and stated that they had been married for 17 years. They had a four-year-old son. However, in the 1901 census, Kim's great grandmother was with a different husband and family, so she and Albert couldn't have been married for 17 years just a decade later.

Kim tried to find Alfred in other records. "I pursued every Alfred Baker within a five-year birth range from Norwich or Norfolk, and managed to rule out quite a few. There was one man of the right age, but he died in 1898."

Solving The Mystery

Out of ideas, she took a DNA test. "It came up with some matches, and as a result I quickly found a marriage between two individuals whose names I didn't recognise. They had a son called Albert Walter Butcher." All the evidence pointed to him being Kim's great grandfather. "I researched Albert Butcher and discovered that in 1898 he was running a pub. One of his regular customers, an Alfred Baker, unfortunately had drinking and gambling problems, and took his own life." Kim's great grandfather disappeared from the records at the same time. "He then turned up in London as Alfred Baker, with the same year of birth as the deceased man, and lived as him for about 14 years."

But why did he do this? Kim ▶

UNP/VICTOR DE JESUS

Kim Thompson Family Tree

"Mum's side had always been a bit of a mystery. She was brought up not to ask questions," says Kim

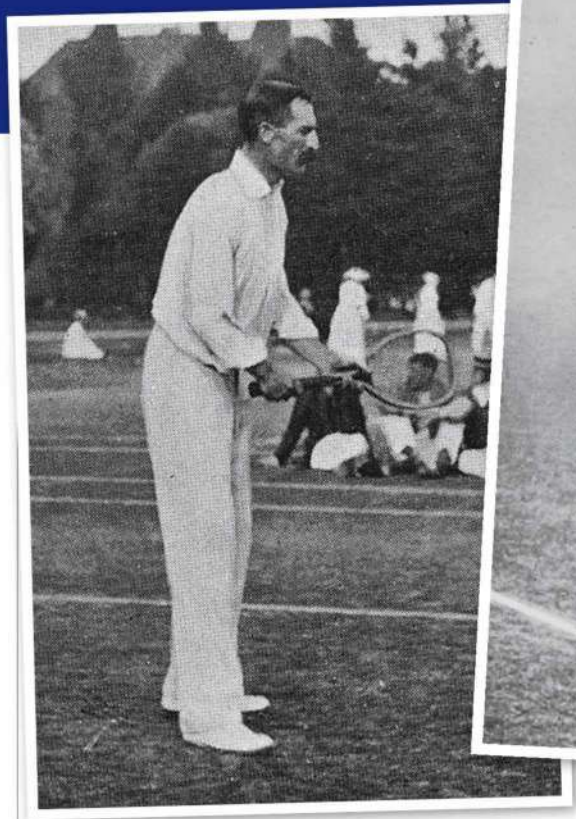
has a theory. "Alfred was the second son in the family, so had a bit of freedom, but in 1893 his father and brother both died, so he found himself as the head of the family looking after his mother and younger sisters. Then he met an older woman who was widowed with a young family. He married her and took on a second job as a pub landlord. His wife had her own problems – in fact, later on she got into trouble for running a house of ill repute."

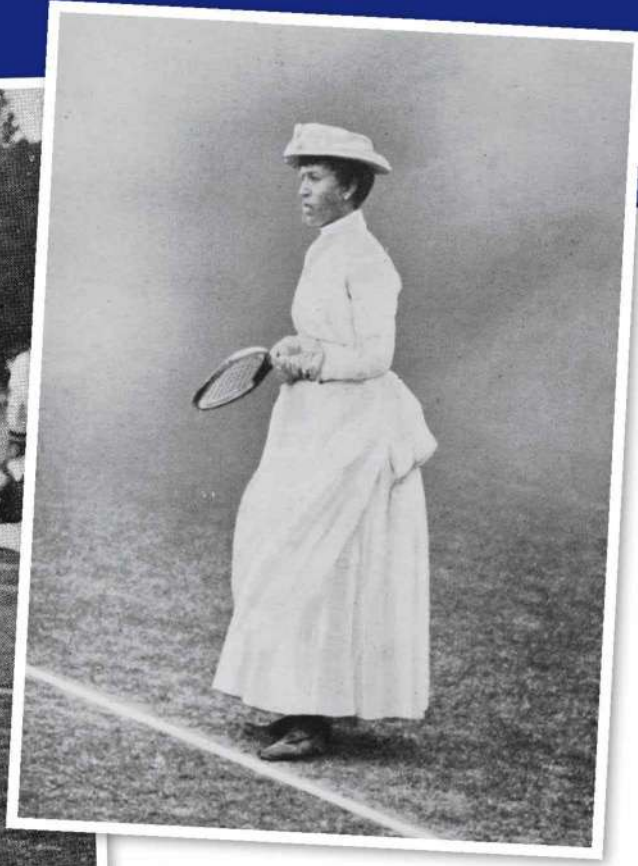
A Fraudulent Fresh Start

Kim suspects that the pressure of trying to support his wife and family, as well as his mother, got too much for him… and when his customer committed suicide, he saw it as an opportunity to adopt his identity, escape his responsibilities and start a new life somewhere else.

Now she knew who her great grandfather really was, a lot of her maternal tree fell into place. Her mum's paternal grandmother, Catherine Hanson, was born in Bethnal Green and grew up in Whitechapel. "She worked with her mother at the Bryant and May match factory in Bow, and was there in 1888 when the match girls went on strike. Her father was George Hanson, a milkman/dairyman, and his cousin was Sir Reginald Hansen, lord mayor of London during the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887."

Kim researched extended family members too, and looking at the 1891 census she noticed that Reginald's wife's sister, Blanche Bingley Hillyard, was recorded as a tennis player. This turned out to be an understatement.





George Hillyard and his wife Blanche Bingley Hillyard made their mark on the history of tennis in more ways than one

When Kim began trawling the newspaper archives, she discovered that Blanche had been a superstar of the game. "She was the second woman to win the Women's Singles at Wimbledon, and later became the first mother to win a Wimbledon title."

The inaugural Lawn Tennis Championship at Wimbledon took place in 1877 and included just one event – the Gentlemen's Singles. The popularity of tennis quickly grew, and seven years later the championship added competitions for Men's Doubles and Women's Singles.

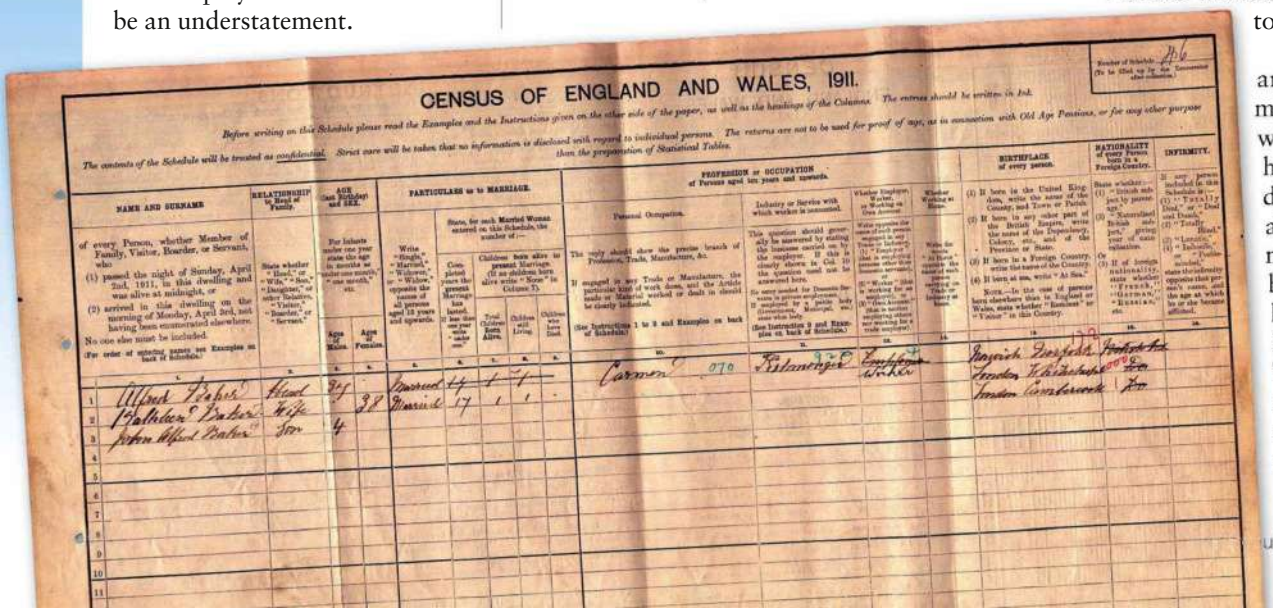
According to the official Wimbledon website (**wimbledon.com**), Blanche is "one of the all-time greats of the sport". She won the first of her six titles in 1886, a total bettered only by the likes of Martina Navratilova, Steffi Graf and Serena Williams.

Blanche married George Hillyard in 1887. He had an interesting sporting career as well.

"George had been in the Navy with George V (Prince George at the time) and his brother, Prince Albert." Like his wife, he was an outstanding tennis player. "I found an article in the newspaper archives that told how he'd introduced the royal family to lawn tennis." He had an illustrious playing career in England and Europe, which included winning the Singles, Doubles, Singles Handicap and Mixed Doubles (with Blanche) at the Monte Carlo Masters in 1896. In addition, George won the Gold Medal in the Men's Doubles at the London Olympic Games in 1908.

He was also secretary of the All England Club between 1907 and 1925, and supervised the moving of the Wimbledon Championships to their current site.

George made another major mark on the sport without a racket in his hand when he developed the first all-weather court made of crushed bricks, which was built at his and Blanche's home in Thorpe Satchville, a small village near Leicester. A great success, the

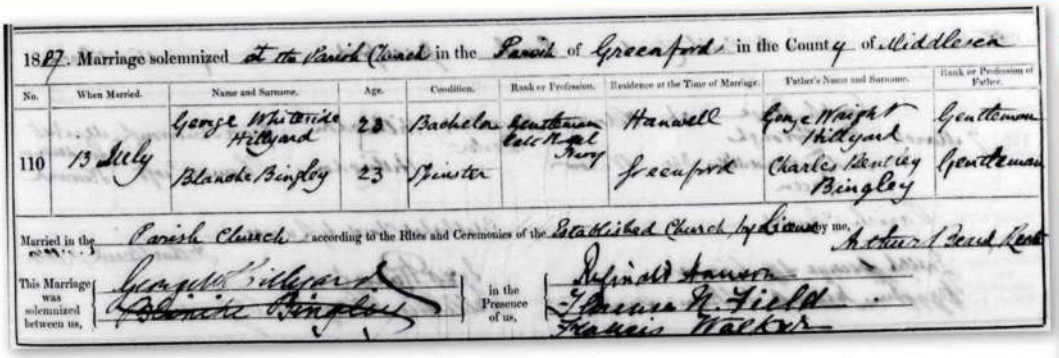


CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, or in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

Name and Surname of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who (1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or (2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included.	Relationship to Head of Family	Age last Birthday and Sex		Particulars as to Marriage					Profession or Occupation					Birthplace	Nationality	Infirmity
		Age of Males	Age of Females													
1 Alfred Baker	Head	35		Married	14	1	1		Carmen	070	Publican	Employer		Norwich		
2 Blanche Baker	Wife		38	Married	17	1	1					Worker		London		
3 John Alfred Baker	Son	4												London		


1887. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of Greenford in the County of Middlesex

No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the Time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
110	13 July	George Whitcombe Hillyard	23	Bachelor	Gentleman Late Royal Navy	Hanwell	George Wright Hillyard	Gentleman
		Blanche Bingley	23	Spinster		Greenford	Charles Bentley Bingley	Gentleman

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church by Licence by me, Arthur Reed Rector

This Marriage was solemnized between us, George W. Hillyard, Blanche Bingley in the Presence of us, Reginald Hanson, Frederick R. Field, Francis Walker

George and Blanche got married in 1887

revolutionary playing surface was introduced to the new Wimbledon site when it was relocated.

During her impressive research, Kim has uncovered another great champion on her family tree who triumphed in a rather more dangerous sport.

"An uncle of Albert Butcher/ Alfred Baker emigrated to Massachusetts in the USA," she reveals. "His great granddaughter, Susan Butcher, became a dog sledder in Alaska, racing dogs across the snow. She took part in the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, a very challenging competition in which 'mushers' travel about 1,000 miles between Anchorage and Nome, and she won it four times."

Sadly in 2006 Susan died of leukaemia, but two years later she was memorialised for her achievements in this physically demanding contest with the creation of Susan Butcher Day, which is celebrated on the first day of the competition every year.

Susan Butcher became a dog sledder in Alaska, racing dogs across the snow

But Kim's latest sporting discovery was much closer to home. "Doing the DNA test connected me with more relatives, and I made contact with some cousins of my mother. They sent me photographs of the family that I'd never seen before." One of them dated from the 1930s: a full-length, black-and-white portrait of a young man in old-fashioned boxer shorts. He's leaning forward on his left foot, his wrapped fists held up in the classic boxing stance.

FORMER TENNIS CHAMPION DIES

Mrs. George Hillyard, one of the greatest lawn tennis players Britain has produced, and winner of 16 Wimbledon titles, died at her home at Pulborough, Sussex, last night, aged 83.

As Miss Blanche Bingley she won the first of her six singles championships in 1886, and the last in 1900. Afterwards she became women's doubles holder seven times up to 1907, and mixed doubles champion three times.

Commander G. W. Hillyard who died in 1943 played tennis for England. He was secretary of the All-England Lawn Tennis Club from 1907 to 1925, and was often called "The man who made Wimbledon." He and his wife were pioneers of the game.

This report of Blanche's death describes the Hillyards as "pioneers of the game"

Bert The Boxer

"A note on the back of the picture said that his name was Bert. My grandad was called Walter Albert, so I asked a few of my aunties if they knew anything about the photograph. One of them told me that her father – my grandad – had said that he had done a little bit of boxing when he was younger." Kim returned to the newspaper archive. "I found a boxing record that confirmed Bert Baker had become a professional welterweight boxer in the 1930s."

Bert was born in Bethnal Green in May 1916. "The club he boxed for was in Paddington. They're not exactly near each other – they're several miles apart – but I discovered that he'd gone into an apprenticeship in Paddington as a French polisher, so I think that's how he ended up boxing in that part of London. That turned into a professional career. When he said 'Oh yes, I used to do boxing', he'd actually hidden five years of his life in that sentence."

"It was quite surprising to find them all," says Kim about the sporting talent on her tree, but she is clearly also very proud. So have championship genes made it down the generations to her? "I'm not sure. The closest I've ever got is running the 800 metres on sports day," she laughs.

Resources

These websites helped Kim research her sporting kin

BOXREC

w **boxrec.com/en**

BoxRec has up-to-date details of both amateur and professional boxers and approximately three million bouts dating from the introduction of the Queensberry Rules in the 1860s. Kim found her grandfather Bert listed here.

BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

If you have a sporting ancestor, scour the online newspaper archives for reports on their performance, matches and competition (or even medal) wins. You may be able to trace the trajectory of their career, or find a profile or obituary packed with fascinating details that you won't find anywhere else.

WIMBLEDON

w **wimbledon.com/en_GB/atoz/history.html**

The official website for the famous Tennis Championships has an interesting section on the history of the competition back to 1877 when the first one was held. It provided Kim with useful context for Blanche's wins.

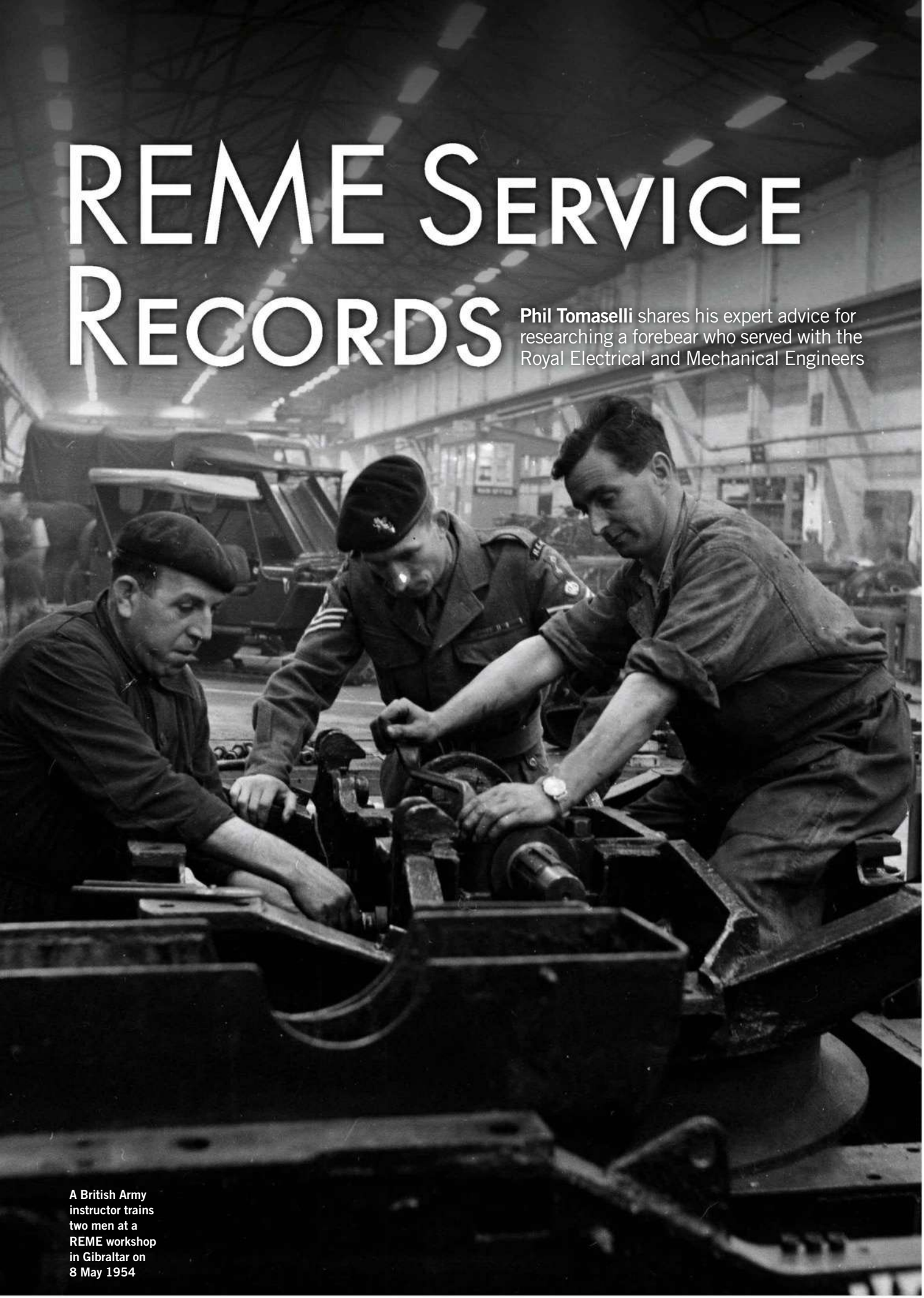
TELL YOUR STORY

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

REME Service Records

Phil Tomaselli shares his expert advice for researching a forebear who served with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers



A British Army instructor trains two men at a REME workshop in Gibraltar on 8 May 1954

GETTY IMAGES

The recent release on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) of service records of 'other rank' soldiers who served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) Corps during the Second World War marks an important step in making public the records of servicemen and servicewomen. Previously only a few smaller units had been digitised (see below).

The REME records, running from 1942 (the year that the corps was created) to 1959 (the year that conscription ended, apart from men who had to defer for apprenticeships etc) contain the records of 133,366 'other ranks'. Some records go back to the 1920s when the soldier enlisted into a different branch of the Army but transferred to the REME after long service. Anyone enlisting before October 1942 will have details of previous service in, for example, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC) included here eventually.

The original records have been transferred to The National Archives (TNA) at Kew. If your relation was an officer then those records are still held by the Ministry of Defence; you can apply directly via **https://www.apply-deceased-military-record.service.gov.uk/**. The system seems pretty user-friendly, but you do need to read the options carefully.

Prioritising Privacy

Since the records run up to 1959 some are, inevitably, not immediately available for reasons of privacy. Only records of servicemen born over 100 years ago have been published, but more should be released annually as the 100 years bar is exceeded. The collection is named 'UK, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Service Records, 1942–1959', and can be found at **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62682/**.

A vehicle's waterproofing is tested at the REME training depot in Arborfield Cross, Wokingham, Berkshire, 21 July 1948

GETTY IMAGES

Before 1942, for historical reasons, serious maintenance and refurbishment of army equipment was dealt with by a range of specialist corps. The RAOC dealt with light weaponry, ammunition and tanks, the Royal Engineers (RE) with heavy plant and machinery, the Royal Corps of Signals (RCS) with communications, the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) with lorries and other vehicles, and the Royal Artillery (RA) with heavy weapons. An integrated fighting unit might have to call in several specialists from different corps to deal with, for example, one tank.

Since this system was clearly inefficient, it was decided to incorporate these specialists into the REME Corps, which was formed on 1 October 1942. It was a bold move in the middle of a world war, but it paid off and its success was demonstrated at the Second Battle of El Alamein, fought in north-west Egypt in October and November the same year. All men were fully trained combat soldiers, and the REME was designated as a combat unit because their work frequently took them into the front-line area. ▶

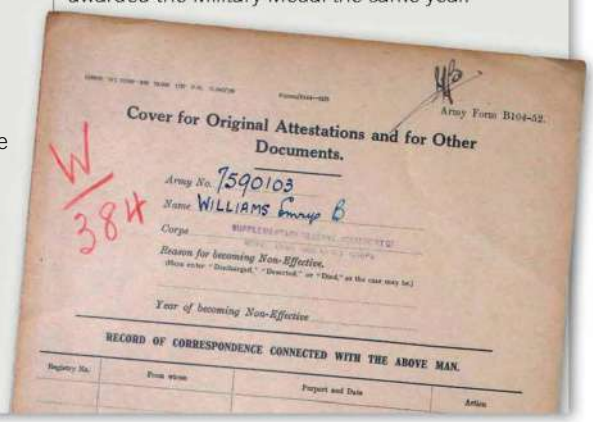
Sergeant Emrys Williams

This Second World War hero served in the REME with great distinction

You can uncover fascinating stories with the help of Ancestry's REME collection, including that of Emrys Williams. Born in 1899, he enlisted into the RAOC Reserve in 1938. He was already an expert in motor vehicles as he had been an Automobile Association patrolman, so became an RAOC fitter.

Called up in August 1939 he served in Britain until September 1941 when he was attached to the Queen's Bays light-tank regiment in North Africa. In January 1942, when two of his unit's tanks were knocked out, Williams drove back and rescued the crews under fire. In May and June 1942 his unit was frequently attacked from the air and "by his coolness and complete disregard of all but a direct attack, [he] was instrumental in maintaining the morale of the personnel under his control". At the Second Battle of El Alamein in October and November 1942, by which point he had been transferred to the REME Corps, he was commended for showing "a complete disregard for enemy shelling and aerial attack".

In 1944 Williams' unit was in Italy and under strength, but he despite "suffering continually from extreme rheumatism, insisted on carrying on with his work, which was of a particularly vital nature". In 1945, still in Italy, he was in charge of a small maintenance party and "it was largely due to [his] magnificent work and example… that the tanks were in first class condition". He was awarded the Military Medal the same year.



Army Form B104-52.

Cover for Original Attestations and for Other Documents.

W 38H

Army No. 7590103

Name WILLIAMS Emrys B

Corps

Reason for becoming Non-Effective.

Year of becoming Non-Effective

RECORD OF CORRESPONDENCE CONNECTED WITH THE ABOVE MAN.

Registry No.	From whom	Purport and Date	Action

This photograph of soldiers working on Lee and Grant medium tanks at REME's barracks in Mill Hill, North London, dates from 4 September 1943

The REME was initially formed from a branch of the RAOC, with technical tradesmen from the RE and RASC being transferred across. After the war the REME took over nearly all equipment-repair duties for other units, and absorbed as part of its reserve some men who'd served the whole war in a different corps (the RASC for example). As a result their service records for their whole career appear in this collection, including men who'd been prisoners of war.

DID YOU KNOW?

Major Ivan Hirst, REME, took over an abandoned Volkswagen factory in northern Germany in 1945, beginning production of the car that became the Beetle.

Wide-Ranging Records

The service records as presented have been scanned to a high quality, so nearly all of the details are clear. They include their enlistment/attestation document, which will be familiar to researchers who've already found a First World War soldier's record, acting as a folder for other documents. These include tracer cards – a quick look-up saying which unit he's with, so that army clerks could easily discover where he was serving and contact him quickly – and a Service and Casualty Form (the title's misleading; it ought to be, perhaps, a Service and Important Events Form) providing a more or less chronological history of his career.

The enlistment/attestation document itself should contain details of family, next of kin, addresses, previous service, civilian employment before enlisting, a physical description, medals awarded, and the army education courses attended. Medical and conduct forms have been excluded for privacy reasons.

The tracer card usually gives basic details of the man himself, as well as recording his movements between units. They sometimes include short-term attachments that are not recorded elsewhere.

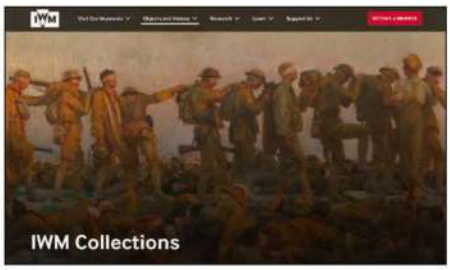
Expert Picks

Phil recommends three key websites to research your REME ancestor's experiences

Ancestry

w **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62682/**

This unmissable collection was among the first tranche of British Army service records from the Second World War that were added to the website in October 2024.



Imperial War Museums

w **iwm.org.uk/collections**

IWM holds photographs, individuals' private papers, and items of equipment relating to the REME, most of which can only be viewed in person. You can search its collections here.

REME Museum

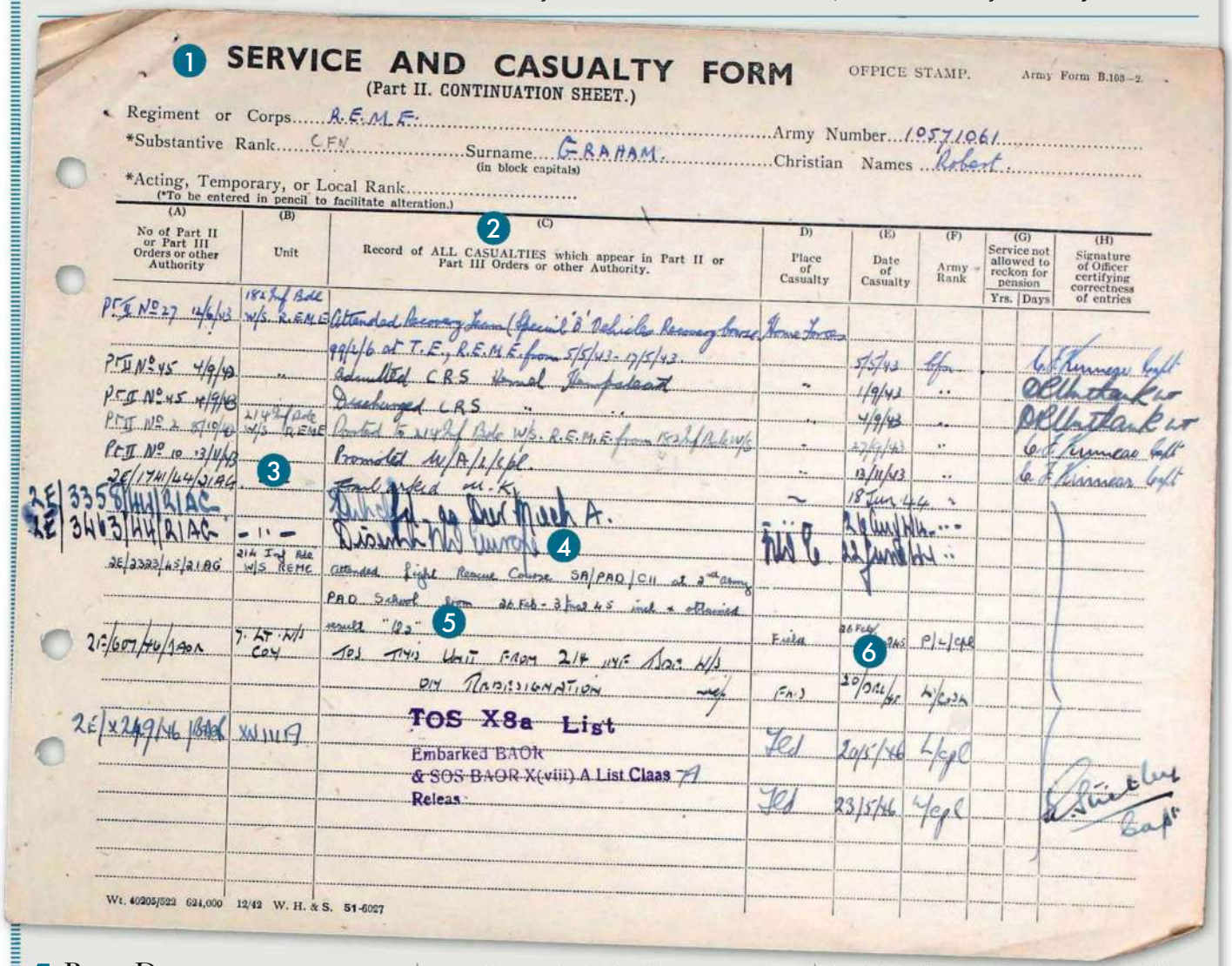
w **rememuseum.org.uk/Blogs/museum-blog**

The blog of the REME Museum has scores of entries about its history and equipment, as well as a biography of the corps' first director Major General Sir Eric Bertram Rowcroft.

GETTY IMAGES

Service And Casualty Form

This record for REME soldier Robert Graham is held by The National Archives at Kew, and on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**)



1 SERVICE AND CASUALTY FORM
(Part II. CONTINUATION SHEET.)

OFFICE STAMP. Army Form B.103—2.

Regiment or Corps: R.E.M.E. Army Number: 10571061

*Substantive Rank: C.F.N. Surname: GRAHAM (in block capitals) Christian Names: Robert

*Acting, Temporary, or Local Rank:
(*To be entered in pencil to facilitate alteration.)

(A) No of Part II or Part III Orders or other Authority	(B) Unit	2 (C) Record of ALL CASUALTIES which appear in Part II or Part III Orders or other Authority.	(D) Place of Casualty	(E) Date of Casualty	(F) Army Rank	(G) Service not allowed to reckon for pension Yrs.	Days	(H) Signature of Officer certifying correctness of entries
PCI No 27 12/6/43	182 Inf Bde W/S R.E.M.E.	Attended Recovery Course (Special 'B' Vehicle Recovery Course)	Home Forces					
		99/2/6 at T.E., R.E.M.E. from 5/5/43 - 17/5/43.		5/5/43	Effn			G. Finnegan Capt
PCII No 45 4/9/43	"	Admitted CRS Venereal Disease	"	1/9/43	"			O.H. Baker
PCII No 45 4/9/43		Discharged CRS " "	"	4/9/43	"			O.H. Baker
PCII No 2 8/10/43	214 Inf Bde W/S R.E.M.E.	Posted to 214 Inf Bde W/S. R.E.M.E. from 182 Inf Bde W/S	"	27/9/43	"			G. Finnegan Capt
PCII No 10 13/11/43		Promoted W/A/2/Cpl.	"	13/11/43	"			G. Finnegan Capt
2E/1741/44/21AG	3	Final marked on K	"	18 Jun 44	"			
2E/3358/44/21AG		Detached to Div Mech A.		18 Jun/44				
2E/3463/44/21AG	-"-	Disembarked NW Europe 4		22 Jun/44				
2E/2323/45/21AG	214 Inf Bde W/S REME	Attended Light Rescue Course SA/PAD/C11 at 3rd Army PAD School from 26 Feb - 3 Mar 45 inc & obtained results "B" 5						
2E/607/46/BAOR	7 LT W/S COY	TOS THIS UNIT FROM 214 INF BDE W/S	Emden	26 Feb 45 6	P/L/Cpl			
		DIV REDESIGNATION	(Ens)	20/12/45	W/Cpl			
2E/X249/46/BAOR	W III A	TOS X8a List	Jed	20/5/46	L/Cpl			
		Embarked BAOR & SOS BAOR X(viii) A List Class A						
		Releas	Jed	23/5/46	L/Cpl			

Wt. 40205/522 624,000 12/42 W. H. & S. 51-6027

1 Basic Details

The top section gives basic details: the soldier's regiment or corps, his surname and forename(s), and rank. His Army Number is also included; unlike in the First World War this is unique to a soldier, and does not change if he moves to a new corps/regiment.

2 All Casualties

The word casualty really means "event". The broadest column details courses, promotions, embarkations for overseas etc. The events should be listed chronologically.

3 Unit

This column gives details of units serving in or transferred to, which can be used to trace relevant War Diaries.

4 NW Europe

An important event occurred on 22 June 1944 when Robert disembarked for the fighting in north-west Europe with 214 Infantry Brigade Workshop.

5 Course

Following Robert's passing a training course in 1945, he was promoted to the rank of lance corporal.

6 20 Dec 45

Robert was transferred to the 7th Light Workshop Company on 20 December 1945.

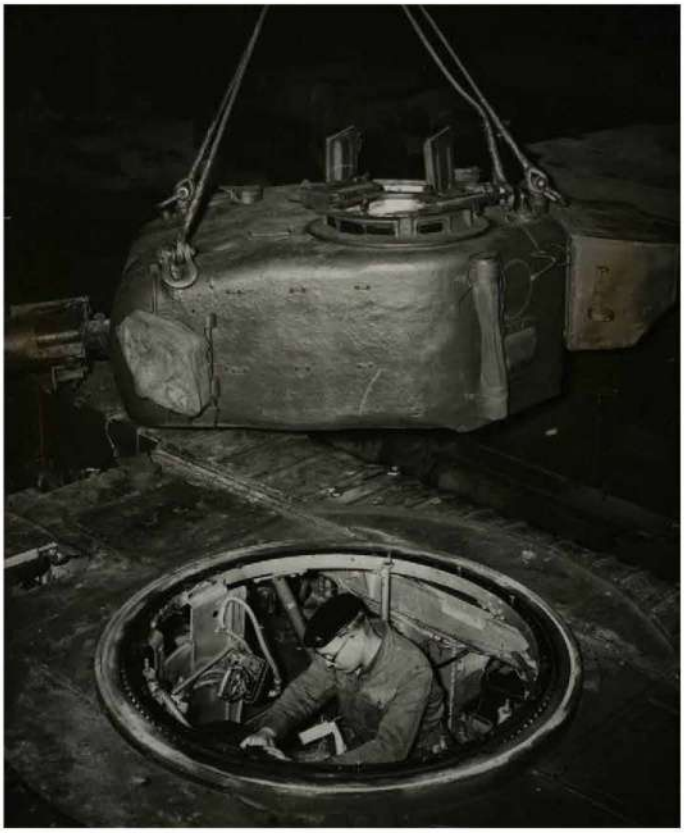
The Service and Casualty Form (see the annotated document) contains details of unit(s), promotions, sickness etc. In theory this should tell you everything else that you need to know, but there are occasional errors in chronology caused by a later message arriving before an earlier one.

If your soldier was in the REME but later transferred to another unit, his record won't be included in this release. However, it should still be possible to trace his record by using a form within TNA's online catalogue Discovery to request a paid search – for full details, see **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mod-open-foi-request-step1**. If he appears to have served in a different regiment than you expected, when you open the record you will probably find that he later ▶

transferred to the regiment that you knew about.

Once you've identified the REME unit(s) that your relative served in, it ought to be possible to trace its War Diary or Diaries (some units have two or three). However, the process is complicated.

War Diaries from the Second World War are divided into geographical areas, each with its own series. If you have a unit name and number then you can type them plus the word REME into the 'Search for' text field at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**; for example, a search for REME 214 Infantry Brigade – one of the units mentioned on the annotated document – should result in links to WO 171/710 and WO 171/4439, referring to the REME workshop War Diaries for 1944 and 1945.



A soldier works on a Churchill tank at REME's workshop in Ashford, Kent, 1951

Diary Dates

Note that there are 1,188 REME War Diaries, so even if you can provide a unit's name and number finding the particular one(s) that you need might be time-consuming. Try restricting the dates covered or, if you know where your relation served, TNA's research guide 'British Army Operations in the Second World War' at **nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-army-operations-second-world-war/** will reveal the geographical code for the specific area that you want.

Some REME men were attached to other regular units – in the case of Sergeant Emrys Williams (see the box), the cavalry regiment the 2nd Dragoon Guards (the Queen's Bays). Searching Discovery for 2 Dragoon Guards will give you details of six War Diaries covering 1939–1945 in series WO 166 (UK), WO 169 (the Middle East) and WO 170 (Italy).

Unfortunately few, if any, of these War Diaries are available digitally, so a visit to Kew will be necessary to see them where you can photograph them at no cost.

Also recently released on Ancestry is the collection 'UK, Selected Smaller Units Service Records, 1921–1959' at **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62683/**, for 'other ranks' in the likes of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, the Military Police and Royal Pioneer Corps. If your soldier served in one of these, search by name and corps. Individual records comprise the same papers as the REME records, and can be used in the same way.

Finally the service records of other units are in the process of being digitised, although copying all of them will take some years.

War Diaries from the Second World War are divided into geographical areas

TOP TIP!

Although army clerks were meticulous, mistakes were always possible, so it would be wise to create a schedule of your soldier's service using all the available documents.

PHIL TOMASELLI is a military family history expert and a regular contributor to *WDYTYA? Magazine*. His books include *Tracing Your Second World War Ancestors* (Pen & Sword, 2011)

Resources

Take your research further

BOOK

Craftsmen of the Army: The Story of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Volume I

Brian Bishop Kennett and JA Tatman

Leo Cooper, 1970

This book tells the story of the REME during the Second World War, but is hard to find now because of its age – try your local library.

MUSEUM

REME MUSEUM

a **Calne Road, Lyneham, Chippenham SN15 4XX**

t 01249 894869

e *enquiries@rememuseum.org.uk*

w **rememuseum.org.uk**

The wide-ranging collections at the REME Museum in Wiltshire include operational and campaign reports, tracer cards, unit histories, corps magazines and personal papers. Staff provide a paid research service, and some of its photos can be searched and purchased at **rememuseum.photos**.

WEBSITES

DISCOVERY

w **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**

You can find some REME recommendations for medals by searching TNA's catalogue for the keyword REME. Sadly many recommendations are lost.

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

w **nam.ac.uk/explore/corps-royal-electrical-and-mechanical-engineers**

The highly informative website of the NAM in West London includes a brief history of the REME, some photographs and links to other related corps histories.

GETTY IMAGES

GETTY IMAGES

AGRA MEMBER

Past Discoveries

apg member

UK Wide Family and House History Research

By a Qualified Professional Genealogist - Lisa Dunbar Dip. Gen. QG.

All enquiries are welcome. All types of genealogical research undertaken – including brief look-ups to full family histories, brick-walls in your research, house history research and bespoke bound family history books which are ideal as Birthday or Christmas presents. We also offer various family history packages.

Tel: +44 (0) 1279 651754
Mob: +44 (0) 7966 501874
www.pastdiscoveries.co.uk
enquiries@pastdiscoveries.co.uk

TRENCHARD PARTNERSHIP

AGRA MEMBER

Professional Family History Research undertaken in London and Home Counties archives. All types of UK research considered.

Experienced researchers Mike Trenchard [AGRA Fellow] & Sue Trenchard [AGRA Member] will help you piece your past together and break down your brick walls.

CONTACT US FOR A FREE ASSESSMENT/ESTIMATE

mike@trenchardpartnership.co.uk | sue@familyhistoryresearch-uk.com
07735 988717 | www.trenchardpartnership.co.uk

Pharos Tutors

Guiding the route to your ancestors

Short topic-based **online courses** and **certificate programmes** in family history, local history and related topics.

Flexible options to fit around your learning needs.

Learn from the experts

START YOUR JOURNEY TODAY

www.pharostutors.com

recycle

The **Possibilities** are **Endless**

Recycle your magazine and seven days later it could come back as your newspaper

www.recyclenow.com

AGRA
ASSOCIATION OF GENEALOGISTS AND RESEARCHERS IN ARCHIVES

WHY HIRE AN AGRA GENEALOGIST?

- We represent the best professionals in England and Wales
- Accredited independent genealogists
- Wide-ranging skills to solve challenging problems
- Experienced and regular archive researchers
- Backed by a Code of Practice to offer peace of mind

Visit **www.agra.org.uk/memberbrowse** to find the right genealogist for your research.

AGRA - Genealogical Excellence

DON'T MISS THE WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? NEWSLETTER

Get essential updates from the world of family history with our **FREE** email newsletter, delivered to your inbox every week

KEEP UPDATED!
Don't miss out on important family history news

Latest News
Accurate, in-depth coverage of the week's biggest record releases and genealogy news

Family History Tutorials
Learn how to master basic skills or take your research further with our genealogy tutorials, packed with top tips and expert advice

Latest Offers
Discover our round-up of new deals and discounts for family historians – helping you save money

Real Stories
Read extraordinary real-life stories that our readers have uncovered while researching their trees

GETTY IMAGES

SIGN UP TODAY BY VISITING
whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com
SCROLL DOWN TO FIND OUR 'SIGN ME UP' BOX

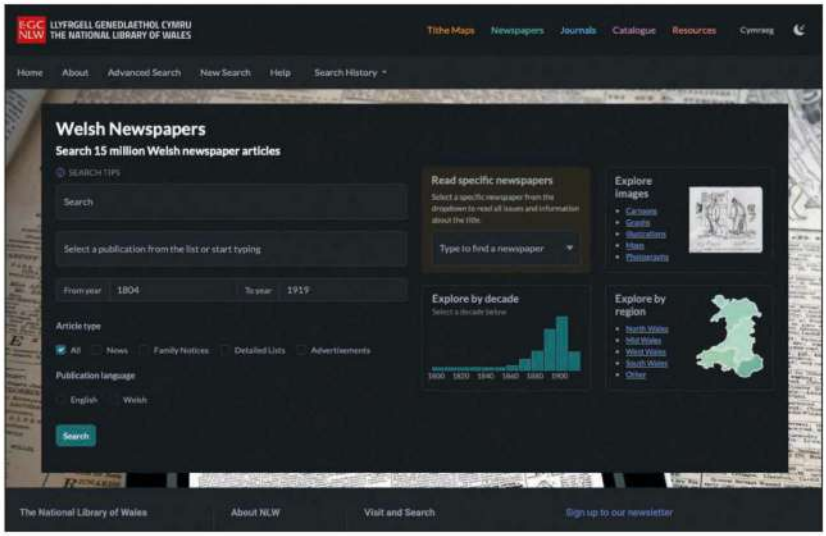
Miners and their family photographed in North Wales on 7 July 1931

WALES

Jonathan Scott shares the most useful digital resources for researching Welsh roots

The custom of Welsh patronymic names means that in certain times and places, the surname of the child would be based on the father's first name. Therefore if a Thomas Davis had a son called Stephen, he would be Stephen Thomas. And if he in turn had a son called Evan, the boy would be called Evan Stephens. Similarly an eldest son might be named after his paternal grandfather, and an eldest daughter after her paternal grandmother, then second sons and daughters might take the names of maternal grandparents, and third sons and daughters the names of their parents. Jones, which derived from the first name John, is by far the most common surname in Wales, particularly concentrated in the north.

Although this can undoubtedly set some challenges for family historians, there is a huge amount of research data online – including civil registration indexes, cross-county parish registers, school logbooks and electoral registers. Plus the National Library of Wales, as well as several county archives featured this month, have produced name-rich databases that can be accessed for free.



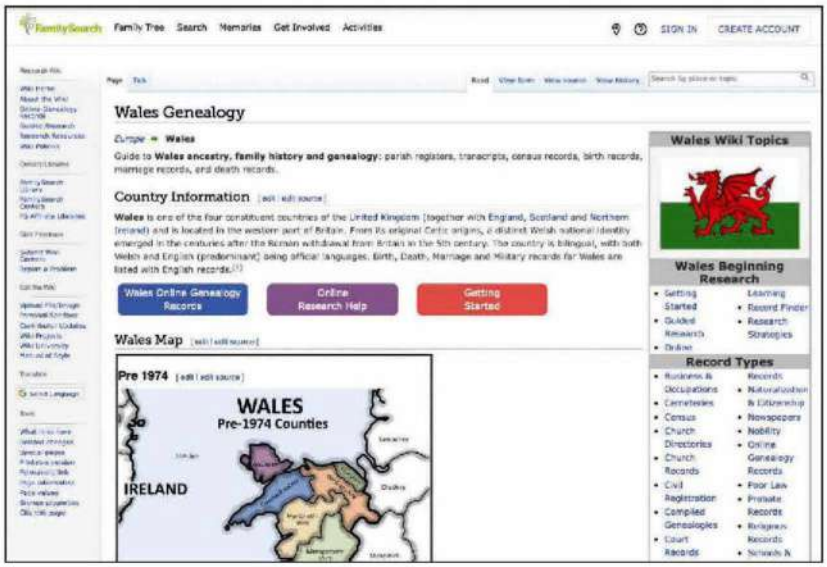
WELSH NEWSPAPERS ONLINE

W **newspapers.library.wales**

Although the National Library of Wales' (NLW's) website appears elsewhere in this article, the newspapers hub deserves its own entry. This is home to about 15 million articles from 120 titles, generally up to 1910, but also including newspaper content digitised through the Welsh Experience of World War One centenary project. You can narrow a search to one title, filter by date, select a region within Wales, and/or tick article type (such as news, family notices or adverts) or image type (cartoons, maps, illustrations, photos). Finally you can select titles published in Welsh or English. If you've used the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) then you've seen these kinds of tools before. But here, every single article is free to access.

GETTY IMAGES

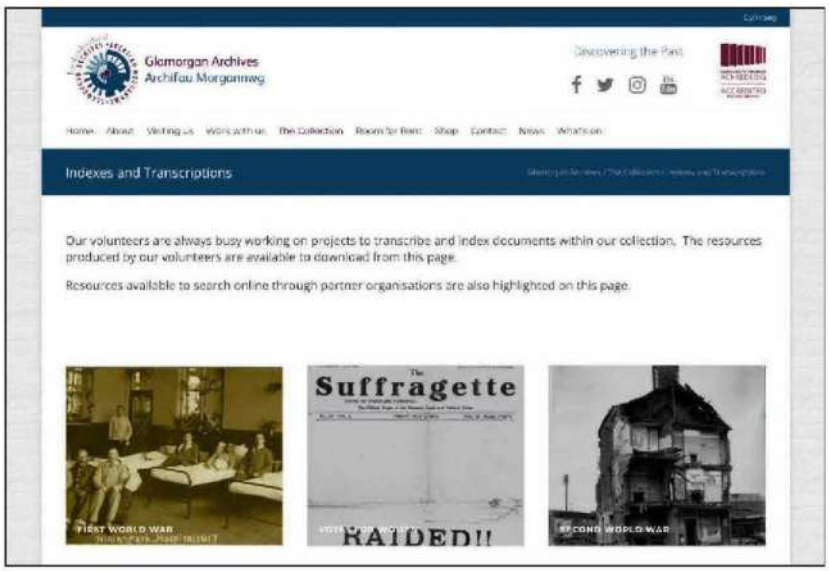
BEST WEBSITES



FAMILYSEARCH'S WELSH WIKI

w **familysearch.org/en/wiki/Wales_Genealogy**

The Welsh Wiki on FamilySearch is a useful gateway to digitised content. You'll find links to some of the subscription-based data on Ancestry, Findmypast and TheGenealogist (all of them among my picks this month), as well as guidance around county jurisdictions. One relatively new collection on FamilySearch itself is 'Wales Court and Miscellaneous Records, 1542–1911', with 408,660 free-to-view images. These court records and marriage bonds, held at the NLW, are "gateway records" enabling you to go back before the census and civil registration. Finally there's a guide to Welsh naming customs at **familysearch.org/en/wiki/Wales_Naming_Customs**.



GLAMORGAN ARCHIVES

w **glamarchives.gov.uk/collection/indexes-and-transcriptions/**

Glamorgan Archives' website includes this unmissable page containing links to both free material and commercially available datasets, for example the Welsh parish registers published on Findmypast (see the 'Go Further' box). The First World War centenary saw volunteers produce indexes to a variety of records, including school logbooks. One example, the first in a collection of war-related entries in a logbook from a school in Aberdare, reads, "Miss Cronk absent having gone to London to see her brother who was in the hospital wounded." There's also a Roll of Honour of Employees of the Cardiff Corporation.

EXPERT'S CHOICE

Gill Thomas is a Welsh genealogist and tutor (**whowhatwhereresearch.com**)

The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, 8 July 1937

I am always asked about my favourite resources when I run my annual course on Welsh ancestry for the Society of Genealogists (**sog.org.uk**). The National Library of Wales (**library.wales**) is top of my list of recommendations for a variety of reasons, but mainly for the sheer breadth of what's on offer. This free site is unparalleled for Welsh research.

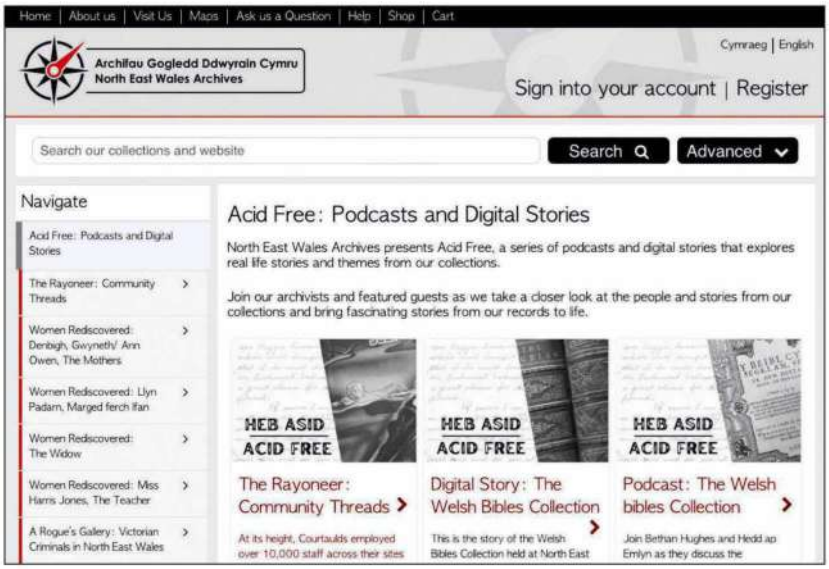
Pre-1858 wills have been digitised, with the five dioceses of Wales searchable by name and parish. The collection of historic journals also can be a source of unexpected resources. The Crime and Punishments database is a record of petty crimes – did your ancestor receive a fine for the crime of sedition, allowing dissenting worshippers to meet in his barn? Marriage bonds and pre-1817 affidavits offer another way of identifying maiden names.

The library has a vast collection of newspapers both in English and Welsh, which unfortunately end in 1917 (I live in hope that this will be extended), and as Jonathan mentions the digitised copies can be searched very effectively.

NLW's latest digital initiative involves 1923's Welsh Women's Peace Petition; 390,296 women, including my own grandmothers, were signatories, and the readers of *WDYTYA? Magazine* contributed to the ongoing effort to transcribe their details on Transcription Tuesday in November.

Finally, you can search and browse more than 300,000 tithe maps on NLW's site, layer them over other maps, and view the apportionments. Many areas had very large parishes, and if your ancestors were nonconformists then you might be surprised to find a chapel in the middle of the countryside.

GETTY IMAGES



NORTH EAST WALES ARCHIVES

w **www.newa.wales/podcasts-and-digital-stories/**

Acid Free is a series of podcasts and digital stories that draw on material held by this archive service, the result of a merger between the Flintshire and Denbighshire county offices. One example was inspired by the acquisition of back issues of *The Rayoneer*, a staff magazine for clothing manufacturer Courtaulds which employed more than 10,000 people at four sites in the area. The title include news, obituaries, "departmental gossip", and photos of sports and social clubs. Elsewhere a 'What's Online' page leads to numerous digitised sources, including constabulary mug shots, quarter sessions and shipping registers: **www.newa.wales/whats-online/**.

ANCESTRY

w **ancestry.co.uk/search/categories/welsh_parish/**

Since 2020 Welsh parish material that for around a decade was only available through Findmypast has been on both Ancestry and TheGenealogist as well. This means that whichever site you subscribe to, you can access vital parish registers from across the country. Ancestry's other Welsh highlights include Poor Law union material, jail records, Glamorgan workhouse registers (1850–1920) totalling nearly 900,000 entries, and a huge collection of electoral registers. Indeed those for Glamorgan, which cover 1832–1978, include a staggering 35 million names. You can also find a further six million names for Swansea and the surrounding area.

Go Further

These 10 websites are also recommended

ARCHIVES WALES

w **archives.wales**

Here are details of cross-archive projects. You can search catalogues of Welsh institutions via the Archives Hub (**archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/**).

ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES OF WALES

w **fhswales.org.uk**

This site includes links to each member group.

FINDMYPAST

w **bit.ly/fmp-wales-collection**

This is the landing page for Welsh baptism, banns, marriage and burial records.

FLINTSHIRE WAR MEMORIALS

w **flintshirewarmemorials.com**

Search the names carved in memorial stones.

NORTH WALES BMD

w **northwalesbmd.org.uk/index.php**

This website has been online since 2003.

PEOPLE'S COLLECTION WALES

w **peoplescollection.wales**

Explore a free collection of photos, documents, and audio and video recordings.

THEGENEALOGIST

w **thegenealogist.co.uk/welsh-parish-records/**

The website's Welsh parish records page uses *WDYTYA?* star Ruth Jones as a case study.

WELSH COAL MINES

w **welshcoalmines.co.uk**

This site includes historical biographies.

WELSH MARINERS

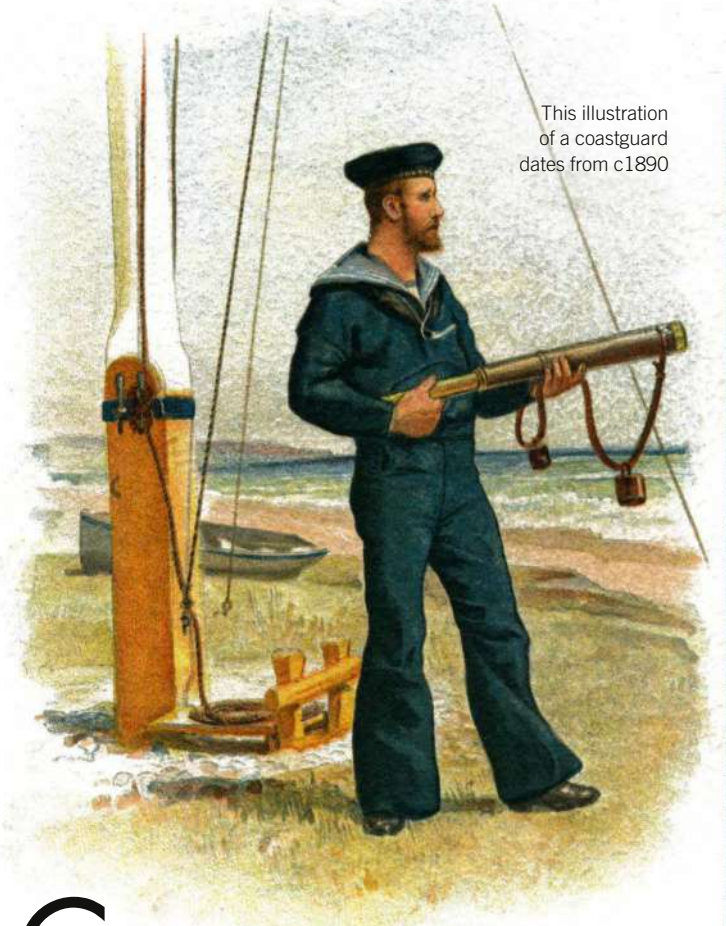
w **welshmariners.org.uk**

Find details of 23,750 mariners (1800–1945).

WELSH SAINTS PROJECT

w **welshsaints.byu.edu**

Search converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who emigrated from Wales to the USA during the 19th century.



This illustration of a coastguard dates from c1890

COASTGUARD

Dr Simon Wills explains the long history of the Coastguard, and how to make the most of a collection recently added to Findmypast

As their name suggests, coastguards have long existed to manage the safety of Britain's shores. Before the formal establishment of His Majesty's Coastguard in 1822, this role had been carried out by various other services that had overlapping functions. They included the Preventive Service (or Water Guard), Riding Officers (Land Guard), Revenue Cruisers, and elements of the Royal Navy. These earlier services were primarily concerned with the control of smuggling and ensuring that customs dues were paid, but they also had a safety role – for example, spotting and assisting with coastal shipwrecks. Unfortunately, these services sometimes suffered from a poor reputation because of incompetence or corruption.

Coastguard Hierarchy

Elements of the earlier services were combined to create the Coastguard, with a force of about 3,000 men. 'Rank and file' employees were called boatmen on appointment, and became commissioned boatmen once their appointment was firmly established. Senior men with a leadership and disciplinary role were called chief boatmen. Ranks for commissioned officers followed the Navy's style of lieutenant, captain and so forth. The chief officer in charge of each coastguard station was usually a lieutenant. The Coastguard initially had the same role as its predecessors regarding smuggling, revenue and shipwrecks, but its role in coastal safety has gradually come to predominate.

Life in the Coastguard was demanding. The historically poor reputation of the role meant that discipline was harsh in the new service, and there were regular inspections to ensure that standards were being met. There was a high turnover of staff with a low threshold for dismissal. Men worked long hours of about 16 hours a day, mainly overnight, and there were many rules

Index, 1822

1 Name The officer abbreviation "Lt" or "Lieut" (lieutenant) may appear here.

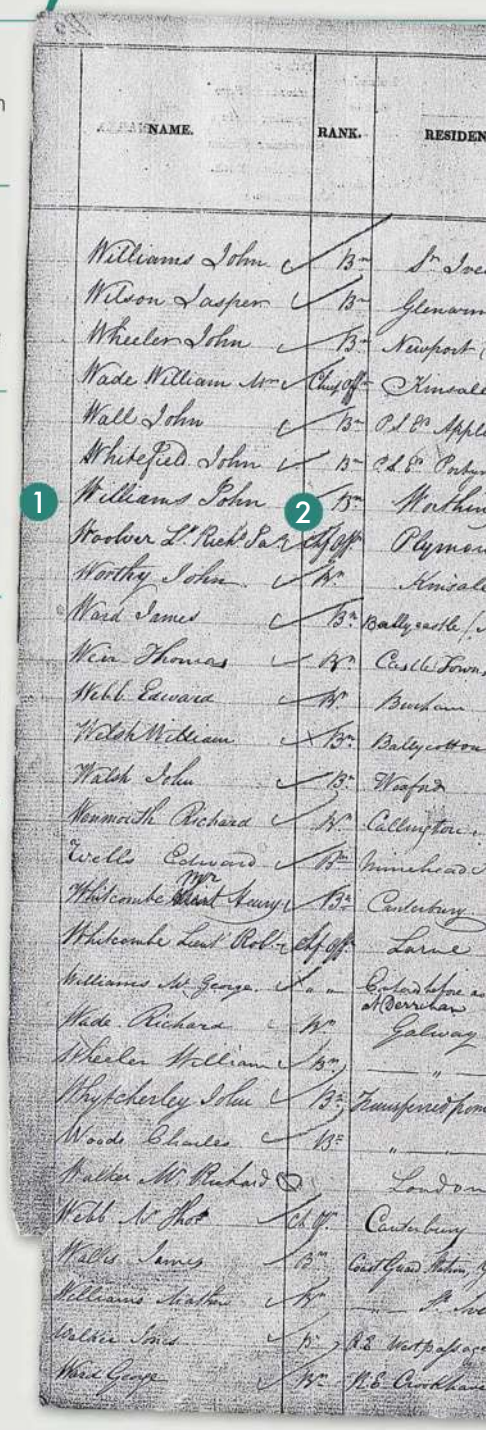
2 Rank Ranks are also abbreviated – examples include "Bm" (boatman) and "Chf Offr" or "CO" (for chief officer).

3 Station The Coastguard station where the man will be based is given. Sometimes this is the name of a ship.

4 Personal Details Age, place of birth, marital status and number of children are all recorded here.

5 Qualification This section of the page may include the words "rejected" or "unsuitable" for applicants who failed.

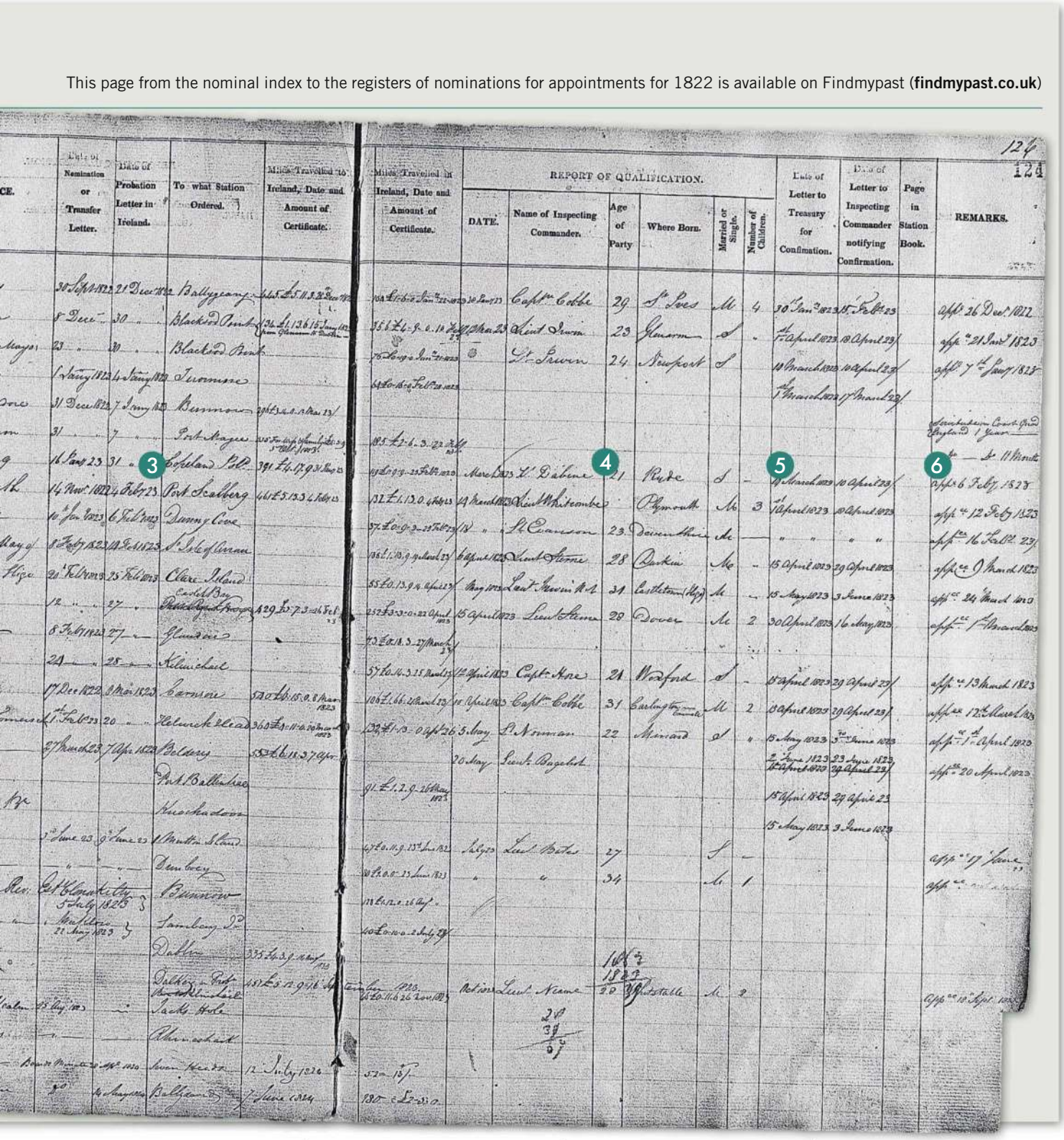
6 Remarks The actual date of appointment is recorded in this column.



NAME.	RANK.	RESIDEN
Williams John	Bm	St Ives
Wilson Jasper	Bm	Glenarm
Wheeler John	Bm	Newport
Wade William Mr	Chf Off	Kinsale
Wall John	Bm	Pd Br Appl
Whitefield John	Bm	Pd Br Orby
Williams John	Bm	Worthing
Woolver Lt Rtd Pay	Chf Off	Plymou
Worthy John	Bm	Kinsale
Ward James	Bm	Ballycastle
Wm Thomas	Bm	Castle Town
Webb Edward	Bm	Buckan
Welch William	Bm	Ballycotton
Walsh John	Bm	Waterford
Wenmouth Richard	Bm	Callington
Wells Edward	Bm	Minehead
Whitcombe Mr Chief Mary	Bm	Canterbury
Whitcombe Lieut Rtd	Chf Off	Larne
Williams St George	Bm	Cleadhope at Berrihan
Wade Richard	Bm	Galway
Wheeler William	Bm	— " —
Whytcherley John	Bm	Trumpington
Woods Charles	Bm	"
Walker Mr Richard		London
Wells Mr Thos	Chf Off	Canterbury
Wales James	Bm	Coastguard Station
Williams Mathew	Bm	— " —
Wilkie Jas	Bm	R.S. Westport
Wise George	Bm	H.B. Cockham

GETTY IMAGES

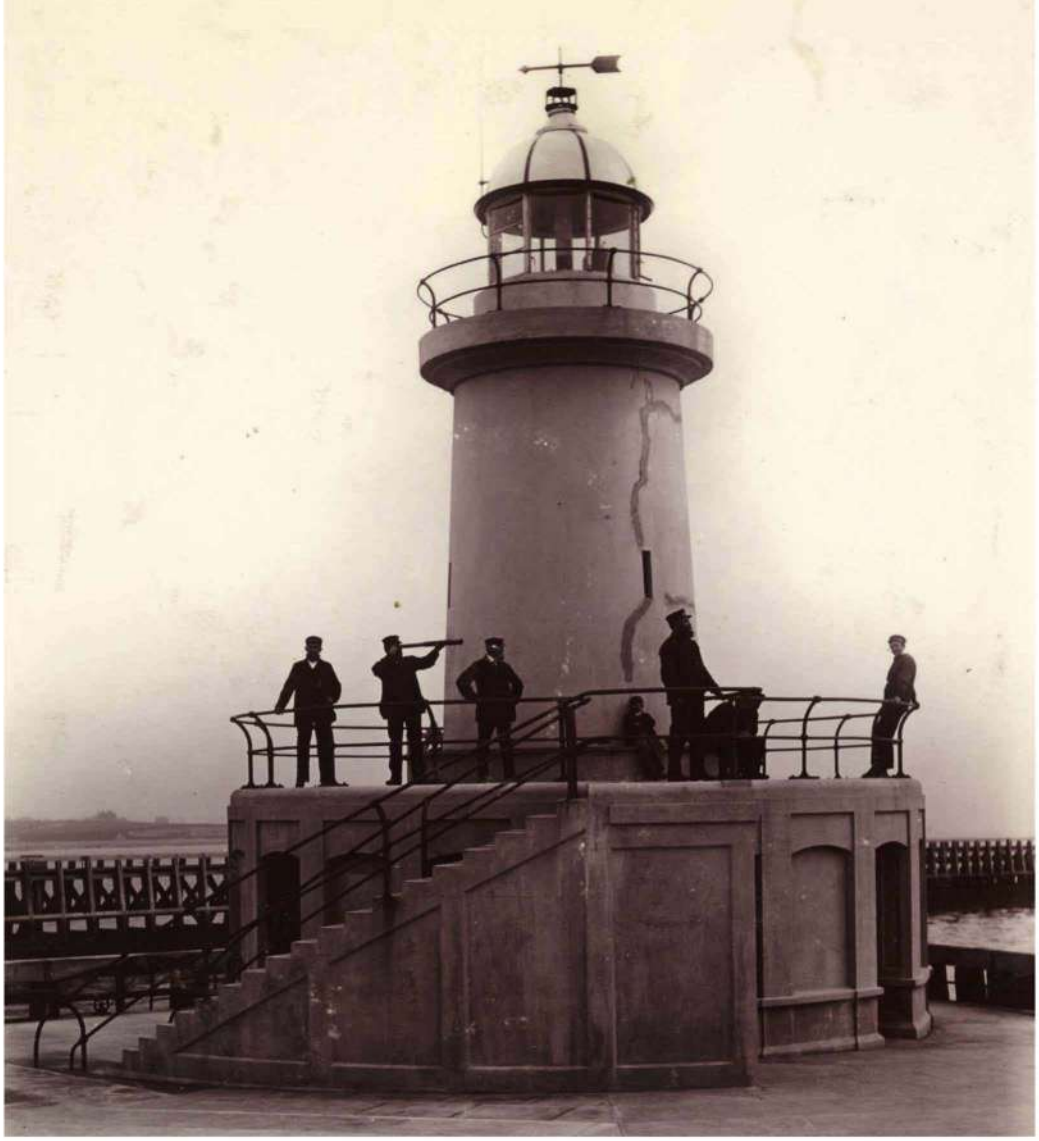
This page from the nominal index to the registers of nominations for appointments for 1822 is available on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**)



designed to discourage corruption, or collusion with smugglers. For example, coastguards were not allowed to own a boat, run a pub or operate a trade. Smuggling gangs could be violent – beating and even killing anyone who opposed them – so every coastguard carried a firearm while on duty, for which regular rigorous training was mandatory.

The details of local patrols were also kept secret and changed daily, so that smugglers could not anticipate them. However, there were rewards too. Prize money was paid to coastguards who successfully arrested smugglers or seized their contraband.

Photographs of your coastguard ancestors in the Victorian era and the early 20th century will show them in Royal Navy uniforms. Boatmen were dressed as Navy ratings but carried the text "Coast Guard" on their cap tallies instead of the name of a ship. Usually, this is displayed in the form of the words "Coast" and "Guard" with a crown ▶



This photo of a group of coastguards standing around the base of a harbour lighthouse was taken c1905

separating the two words. The equivalent of petty officers and commissioned officers also wore Royal Navy uniforms.

However, in 1923 the control of the service was moved from the Admiralty to the Board of Trade, resulting in a change of uniform. A new "CG" logo was adopted, which may be visible on cap badges in photographs.

The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**) holds all of the surviving records about coastguard personnel. The Coastguard establishment books (reference ADM 175) are the most important and contain career records from 1801–1952; they can be searched and downloaded as digital microfilm via TNA's online catalogue Discovery at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1884**. These records are now available on Findmypast in the collection 'Coastguards 1801–1952' (**search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/coastguards-1801-1952**). They consist of several types of document including establishment books themselves, registers of nominations for appointment, service records, and ships' record books. These all tend to show where a coastguard was based, their rank, movements and some basic activities. There is also a register of discharges from the Coastguard in 1919, when the service was significantly downsized. Other information provided by these sources may include age, place of residence, rank and coastguard station. The surviving records do have gaps in their content, and some documents were not completed fully.

Following A Career

The register of nominations for appointment usually reveals a man's first posting, then successive entries in the establishment books will tell you where he was posted next. The establishment books will tell you a man's previous posting as well as the current one. Some coastguards moved jobs frequently, whereas others stayed in the same location for years. For example, 25-year-old lieutenant Edward Digby started his career at stations in Northern Ireland in 1826, but later moved to south-east England and commanded coastguard stations such as Ramsgate, Yarmouth and Harwich.

TNA has additional records including details of pensions and appointments to Revenue Cruisers, plus information about stations. See the guides for researching coastguard officers (**tinyurl.com/tna-guide-coast-officers**) and stations (**tinyurl.com/tna-guide-coast-stations**).

TOP TIP!

Many coastguards previously served in the Royal Navy, so TNA's Royal Navy records can help flesh out a man's career. You should consult the guides at **tinyurl.com/tna-guides-r**.

Resources

Don't miss these websites

BOOK

Coastguard! An Official History of HM Coastguard
William Webb
HM Stationery Office, 1976
This detailed description of the Coastguard's history runs from its earliest days through to the second half of the 20th century.

MUSEUM

NATIONAL EMERGENCY SERVICES MUSEUM
a **The Old Police/Fire Station, West Bar, Sheffield S3 8PT**
t 0114 249 1999
e *info@visitnesm.org.uk*
w **visitnesm.org.uk**
This museum includes an exhibition about the history of the Coastguard tracing its evolving role.

WEBSITE

HM COASTGUARD
w **hmcoastguard.uk/history**
The website of the modern Coastguard includes an illustrated timeline.

DR SIMON WILLS died in October 2024. He was a historian and genealogist with over 35 years' experience, the author of many books including *Shipwrecks in 100 Objects* (Frontline, 2022), and a much-loved contributor to both the TV series *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *WDYTYA? Magazine*

GETTY IMAGES

Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Anthony Adolph is a professional genealogist and the author of 11 books

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Beryl Evans is a family historian and the author of *Tracing Your Welsh Ancestors*

Jayne Shrimpton is a professional dress historian and portrait specialist

Alan Stewart is a family history writer, and author of *Grow Your Own Family Tree*

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

In which battalion did my great uncle Bill serve?

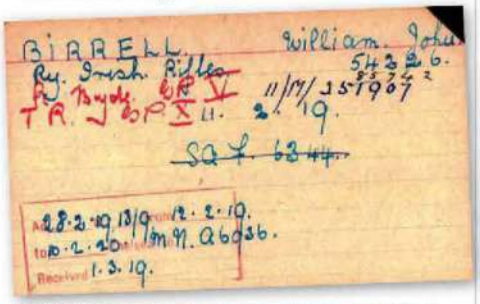
Q My great uncle Bill, William John Birrell, was born on 9 May 1899 in Fulham, London, and lived most of his life in Brixton, London. Family lore tells that Bill enlisted as soon as he turned 18, but served for maybe only a year, before he sustained wounds that left him with a "withered" left arm.

I can't find his service record, but there is a Silver War Badge record for a William John Birrell who served with the Royal Irish Rifles, and who enlisted in June 1917. There is also a pension record card for the same person.

I have a picture dated 1917 of Bill in uniform. However, the cap badge is that of the Somerset Light Infantry.

Did my great uncle also serve in the Royal Irish Rifles?

Christine Nottage



Christine has managed to unearth her great uncle William John Birrell's First World War pension card

A I've searched the Medal Index Cards (MICs) on The National Archives' (TNA's) site, as I find its indexing generally better than on other websites: **nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/british-army-medal-index-cards-1914-1920/**. Although there are plenty of William Birrells, there's only one William John, and that's the Royal Irish Rifles chap. I've scoured the records but can find nothing more than you have, apart from his medal roll on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) showing that he served in the 2nd Battalion Royal Irish Regiment (RIR).

In the 1911 census, William was in Tooting, South London, so how did he get into the Somerset Light Infantry, then the RIR?

The answer comes from him being born in 1899; he would have been conscripted around his 18th birthday in May 1917, when so many men were being conscripted that training was carried out by special battalions created from former Regular Reserve Battalions. I'd suggest that he was sent to the 45th Training Reserve Battalion, which had formerly been the 9th Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. Their badge consists of a hunting horn hanging beneath a crown as shown. Once he was qualified, he'd be posted to a Distribution Battalion, which would send him to a unit that required reinforcements.

The MIC gives no specific location, so he served in France. The War Diary for the 2nd RIR covering late 1917 to March 1919 can be downloaded from TNA's site (WO 95/2502/4). However, William is unlikely to be named.

Phil Tomaselli

Christine sent us this photo of her great uncle in his uniform, including a cap sporting the Somerset Light Infantry badge

HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL? Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

Where was Robert Akester born?

Q I can't find where my 8x grandfather Robert Akester (or Akister) was born and who his parents were. The earliest record I've found of him is of his marriage to Elizabeth Waff of Stepney in 1756 at Holy Trinity Church, Kingston upon Hull, when he was 23. There is a possible link to a Robert Akister in North Newbald (13 miles from Hull), who married in 1737. Can you help?
Antony Akester

A You should keep an open mind about the spelling of Akester. I've found 10 alternatives in Yorkshire registers, including Acaster, Achister and Ackaster.

Looking at Yorkshire parish registers on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), Akester does not appear at Holy Trinity until Robert's marriage. Around the same time, it first occurs a couple of miles away, in the registers of Hessle and Kirk Ella. This may indicate that a family had recently moved into the area. Consider broadening the search and investigate references to others of the same surname in nearby parishes. For example, check settlement papers as one for a sibling might provide a lead.

Wills proved at the Prerogative and Exchequer Courts of York are indexed on Findmypast and include several wills of possible interest, such as that of Thomas Akister of Cottingham, proved in 1762. Might this be Robert's father? Copies can be obtained from the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York (**york.ac.uk/borthwick/**).

Apprenticeship records often include the father's name and occupation, and sometimes abode. The Hull History Centre (**hullhistorycentre.org.uk**) holds the registers of apprentices bound to freemen, which are searchable online, as well as of those bound to seamen. Also registers of stamp duty paid on indentures include the father's name until 1752 and can be downloaded from The National Archives' site (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**), or searched via subscription websites.

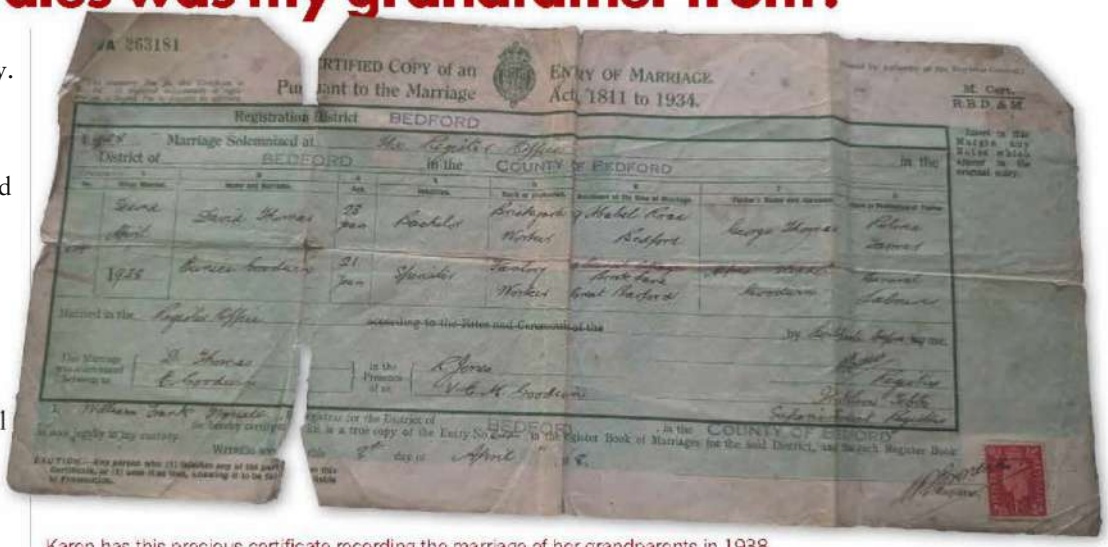
You might also widen your search across the Humber to Lincolnshire, where Acaster appears to have been relatively common.
Katherine Cobb

The index entry for Thomas Akister's will

Where in Wales was my grandfather from?

Q I'm trying to trace my late grandfather's family. He was David Thomas, born on 5 December 1914, we believe in Wales, but arrived in Bedford c1937 and married my grandmother, Eunice Goodwin, in 1938. I cannot find anything earlier than his marriage certificate.

A photograph of my grandfather appears in a book about the bravery of a group of soldiers in Bruneval during the war. It seems he enlisted as William Thomas.
Karen Lacey



Karen has this precious certificate recording the marriage of her grandparents in 1938

A Finding a birth certificate for David Thomas would indeed help you trace your family back in time. His marriage certificate reveals that he was known as David, aged 23 and his father's name was George. This ties in with his date of birth of 5 December 1914 recorded on the 1939 Register, and at the time of his death in 1983 in the civil registration register. The father's name will help you differentiate between any other David Thomas born around the same time.

He appears to have changed his name to William on enlistment at the beginning of the Second World War for some reason. Online accounts relating to his activities during the war suggest that he was born in Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorganshire, but is there any evidence to support this? A search of the 1921 census for a George Thomas with a son David Thomas born c1914 in the Merthyr Tydfil area found no obvious entry. The family may have moved from the area between 1914 and 1921.

I suggest you contact the staff of the Merthyr Tydfil Register Office (**merthyr.gov.uk/resident/births-deaths-marriages/family-history-search/**) asking them to check the birth registers for a David Thomas born on 5 December 1914 with George as the father. If they're not able to find an entry, it is going to be very hard to trace a birth because there are so many babies named David Thomas in each quarter of the General Register Office (GRO) birth indexes. You could also order his service record: **www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-records-of-service**.
Beryl Evans

Picture Analysis

Does this photograph show William Sinclair and family?

Q Can you help me date this photograph? I believe that it's my wife's great great grandfather, William Sinclair, and family. William died in February 1865, aged 48, and lived in Otley, Yorkshire. The other people in the photo are likely to be his wife, Elizabeth, and children: Sarah Jane (born 1839), Hannah (born 1840), Jonathan (born 1842), Catherine (born 1852) and John William (born 1855).
Andrew Howard

A This professional studio group portrait is a *carte de visite* (CDV): a card-mounted photograph that measures approximately 2½ x 4 inches. CDVs became fashionable in Britain in 1860, and dominated Victorian portrait photography. The card mounts remained this standard size but printing styles and reverse designs changed, the back of your particular mount being typical of the mid-1860s to mid-1870s. Consulting a colleague, I also established that Wm Barraclough ran studios in Otley throughout the 1860s, until at least 1871.

The scene is firmly dateable from your wife's relations' appearance: the cut of the men's suits and, especially, the females' outfits. One young woman *(back left)* wears outdoor clothes, but four ladies display fashionable indoor gowns, the distinctive style of their bodices confirming a close timeframe of 1867–1870. A successful Yorkshire working-class or lower-/middle-class family could easily follow fashion, so this might well represent some of your wife's forebears. However, the clear post-1865 date and composition of the group rules out William Sinclair and most of his household.

It is an interesting composition with only two males present, but five females: one a wife/mother figure, the others younger and probably daughters. Hopefully the close date and the combination of sitters should help you to identify who is in the photograph.
Jayne Shrimpton

1 FEMALE FASHIONS
The female figure at the back left is wearing a fashionable loose jacket and neat 'postillion' hat that is forward-tilted over her high hairstyle – both modes of the late 1860s/early 1870s.

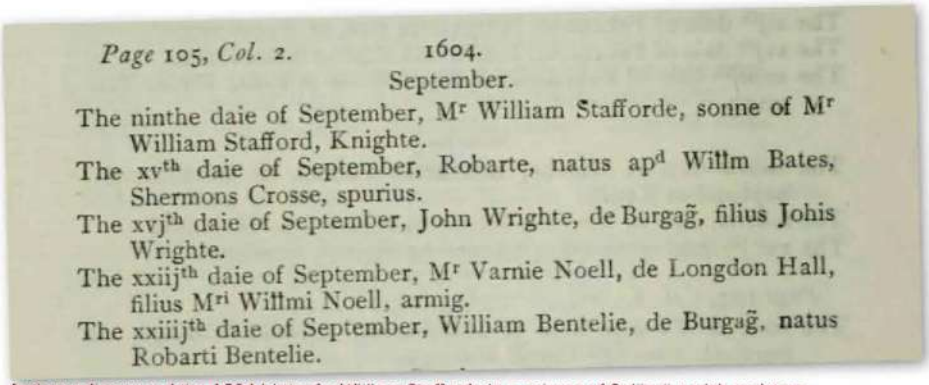
2 FACIAL HAIR
The two men are in their 40s or thereabouts. Their very full bushy beards and pale foreheads (usually concealed under a hat) could suggest that they customarily worked outdoors.

3 GIRLS' HAIRSTYLES
The two seated girls with ringlets are teenagers. They would have been born between the late 1840s and mid-1850s.

4 MEN'S SUITS
The two men wear smart lounge or business jackets with the wide, curved lapels that were in vogue during the late 1860s and early 1870s.

5 BODICES
The fringed square or shallow V-shaped yokes defining the bodice of four females provide a key dating clue: introduced c1867, they frequently appear in photographs taken in 1868 and 1869.

6 MOUNT DETAILS
The blue-printed heraldic-inspired motif and studio details on the back is a type of design often used by photographers in the mid-1860s to mid-1870s.



Page 105, *Col.* 2. 1604.

September.

The ninthe daie of September, Mr William Stafforde, sonne of Mr William Stafford, Knighte.

The xvth daie of September, Robarte, natus apd Willm Bates, Shermons Crosse, spurius.

The xvjth daie of September, John Wrighte, de Burgaĝ, filius Johis Wrighte.

The xxiijth daie of September, Mr Varnie Noell, de Longdon Hall, filius Mri Willmi Noell, armig.

The xxiiijth daie of September, William Bentelie, de Burgaĝ, natus Robarti Bentelie.

Anthony discovered the 1604 birth of a William Stafforde in a volume of Solihull parish registers

Can court records help me find William Stafford's parents?

Q My ancestor William Stafford was christened on 9 September 1604 in Warwickshire. His father was "William Stafford, Knight". William junior died on 3 March 1644 in York County, Virginia, USA. He was made a ward of Francis Mason around 1612 when his parents died of what is thought to have been spotted fever. He travelled to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1622/1624 on the *Furtherance*. I think I've found his parents, but need to prove the link. Will there be court records relating to him being made a ward of Francis Mason that may help my research?
Rosalie Taylor

A If you need to prove the link, then presumably you don't know for sure that your William was the one who was baptised in Warwickshire in 1604.

EA Fry's printed version of the Solihull parish registers shows for 9 September 1604 "Mr William Stafforde, sonne of Mr William Stafford, Knighte". Wards were under-age children of deceased tenants of the Crown, and the records are in the Court of Wards and Liveries at The National Archives (reference WARD 1–15), partly indexed in its online catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**). This includes William Stafford of Gloucestershire (WARD 7/73/27) in 1625/1626, slightly too late for you, and "William Stafford, knight, Northamptonshire" (WARD 7/33/97) in 1606/1607, which may be relevant and a genealogist could examine it for you. The will of William Stafford, knight, of Blatherwycke, Northamptonshire, proved in 1607 at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, is also available to download via Discovery.

So, there is a basis for the alleged origins of your William. You could seek wills for the Staffords of Blatherwycke after 1622/1624 to see if they mention William junior either "beyond the seas" if your theory is correct, or still in the Midlands after 1624, if it's wrong.
Anthony Adolph

TOP TIP Wills that were proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury are free to search and download from **nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/wills-1384-1858/**. You need to register and be logged in to get free access.

Who were Arthur Jones' parents?

Q The 1939 Register lists my great grandfather, Arthur Jones (born 14 May 1874), living in Leigh, Lancashire. The 1911 census gives his place of birth as "S. Wales" with "Merthyr" added later. Arthur married twice. His first marriage certificate has William as his father's name, but on the second it's Arthur.

DNA analysis shows that Arthur fathered an illegitimate child in 1896. I can't find him before then.
Helen Pearson

A I found the birth of an Arthur Jones recorded in the Merthyr Tydfil registration district in the June quarter of 1874 (volume 11a, page 557), mother's maiden surname (MMS) Bevan. Although the 1911 census suggests the Arthur was born in Merthyr Tydfil, the 1921 census on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) gives his birthplace as "Pontypridd, Wales".

There were no Pontypridd birth registrations for an Arthur Jones in the June quarter of 1874, but there was one in the same quarter of 1873 (volume 11a, page 380), MMS Jones. The year given in the 1939 Register may be out by a year.

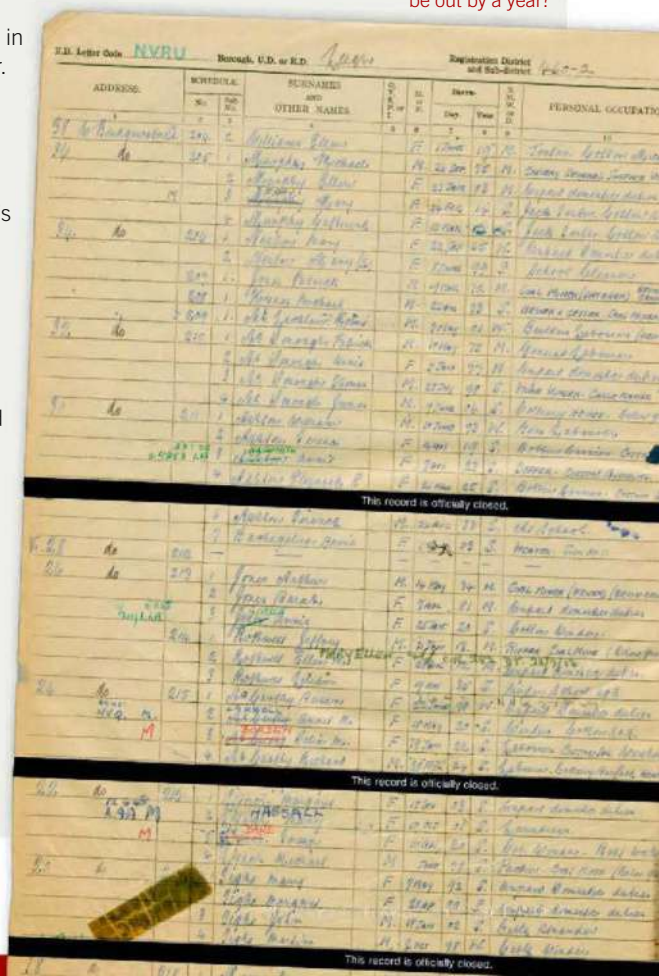
You may wish to obtain these birth records to check the names of the parents. One of them should show the date of birth as 14 May 1873/1874.

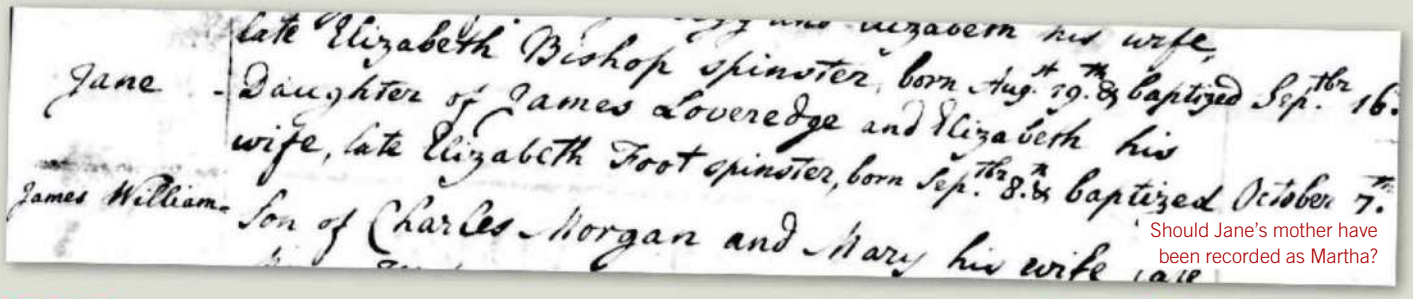
Once you have the names of Arthur's parents, you should be able to find the families in the census returns, beginning with 1881 and working backwards. In addition, you should be able to find the record of the marriage of Arthur's parents.

You may also wish to contact shared matches descended from Arthur's illegitimate child, who may have more information about his family.

By the way, I found news stories in the *Liverpool Echo* and *Liverpool Daily Post* of 30 and 31 December 1941 respectively, about an accident just outside Eccles (near Manchester) in which two passenger trains collided, resulting in the death of 17 people. Among the 81 passengers injured was your Arthur Jones.
Alan Stewart

Could Arthur's birthdate on the 1939 Register be out by a year?




Jane - Daughter of James Loveridge and Elizabeth his wife, late Elizabeth Foot spinster, born Sep.tbr 8.th & baptized October 7.th
James William - Son of Charles Morgan and Mary his wife late

Should Jane's mother have been recorded as Martha?

Why was my ancestor resettled in Devon when she was born in Dorset?

Q I have a query about the settlement of my 3x great grandmother, Jane Loveridge (1798–1853). Her father, James Loveridge, was born in Colyton, Devon, and married Martha Foot in Piddletown (now Puddletown), Dorset, in 1793. A settlement examination of 5 July 1794 granted James, a sojourner, the right to reside in Piddletown. Their first two children were baptised as daughter and son of James Loveridge and his wife Martha (late Foot), but Jane was baptised as daughter of James and his wife Elizabeth (late Foot). Martha was still alive, and she and James had another child in 1801.

In 1820, Jane was given a removal order because she had not gained legal settlement in Piddletown. She was born and raised in Piddletown, so why was this? She was removed to Shute, Devon, where her illegitimate child, Elizabeth Pearce Loveridge, was born (baptised 30 July 1820).

Six years later, Jane was back in Piddletown, where she married John Whiting. John and Jane had four children, all of whom were born and baptised in Piddletown, but the eldest, Elizabeth, was baptised as the daughter of John and Jane Loveridge.

Is this and the record of Jane's parentage simply because of clerical errors?

Tony Riley

TONY RILEY would love to know whether there are clerical errors in his ancestor's records

A There are two reasons for suspecting that the name of Jane's mother was recorded incorrectly at her baptism. Firstly, there is no evidence of a marriage between John Loveridge and Elizabeth Foot, or of any other baptisms for children of this couple. Secondly, baptisms, marriages and burials were sometimes recorded in a rough book and copied into the parish register at a later date, thus providing the opportunity for errors to occur. Occasionally, rough books have survived, so check the Dorset History Centre's catalogue (**archive-catalogue.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/**).

The Elizabeth Loveridge baptism at Piddletown in 1825 may not be that of John and Jane Whiting's daughter. Since the baptism occurred over a year before the couple's marriage, it is unlikely that John's name would have appeared and, if it did, only as "John Whiting reputed father" or similar.

It's more likely that this baptism is that of a child of John and Jane Loveridge who married at Netherbury in 1823. This couple may have moved from Netherbury for a few years following their marriage, because although they had children baptised at Netherbury, the first baptism there did not take place until 1826.

Settlement could be obtained in various ways, and might change during a person's lifetime. James being allowed to remain in Piddletown after the settlement examination is not the same as him being legally settled there; he would have been removed if he became chargeable on the parish. According to James' settlement examination, he completed his apprenticeship at Shute, Devon, meaning he would have obtained legal settlement there.

Because an illegitimate child became settled in, and therefore chargeable to, the parish in which it was born, overseers of the poor were keen to remove expectant single mothers from their parish. In Jane's case, although born and raised in Piddletown, at birth she would have inherited her father's place of settlement of Shute.

Searching the settlement records of Dorset and Devon enables us to piece together something of Jane's story.

In May 1820, shortly before her baby's birth, Jane became chargeable on the parish of Piddletown. The overseers, having examined Jane and her father, had her removed to Shute, so she and the baby became the responsibility of Shute's overseers of the poor. Devon Heritage Centre (**swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/visit/devon-heritage-centre/**) holds two settlement examinations for Jane, both dated 1821. One records that Jane, now in Shute, was born in Piddletown and lived there until she was removed to Shute by the order of two magistrates "about a year ago". The other, that the father of her illegitimate daughter born on 3 July 1821 was William Pearse late of Piddletown, Dorset, labourer, deceased.

Katherine Cobb

Baptisms, marriages and burials were sometimes recorded in a rough book

Military Picture

Is this James Sainsbury Mould?

Q I think this is my great great uncle, James Sainsbury Mould. If this is a Bedfordshire Regiment uniform then it should be him. The photo is signed on the back "brother Jim".
Samantha Mullins

A This is indeed a proud soldier of the Bedfordshire Regiment wearing "full dress" – scarlet tunic, dark blue trousers and swagger cane – in a photograph that was probably taken in 1905/1906. Given the date, the regiment and "brother Jim", this has to be your great great uncle.

James was born in 1886, so he probably enlisted when he was 18 in 1904 and, because the Broderick cap wasn't worn after 1907, the photo was taken before then.

I can't see an obvious family link to the Sainsburys who started the shopping chain, although Sainsbury is an unusual middle name.

In the 1911 census, James is serving in Boaz, Bermuda, as a private with D Company, 2nd Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. He'd have signed up for five years' actual service, with seven years in the Reserve, so he must have extended his service voluntarily.

He was killed on 25 October 1914 in the 1st Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. The War Diary can be freely downloaded from The National Archives' website (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**) under WO 95/1570/1, and shows that he was at Givenchy and Festubert. There was heavy fighting, and 32 men were reported missing.

James is commemorated on the Le Touret Memorial nearby. It's an area that I know well, and I'll lay a poppy for him the next time I'm there.
Phil Tomaselli

1 CAP
The flat-topped Broderick cap, hated by the troops, was introduced in 1902. It was quietly replaced by peaked caps in 1905/1906, and not worn after 1907.

2 CAP BADGE
The cap badge shows a hart (male red deer) in a stream, a visual pun on Hertfordshire, the badge of the Hertfordshire Regiment being adopted by the Bedfords after it merged with the Hertfordshire Militia in the 19th century. The belt buckle James is wearing is similar.

3 SHOULDER TITLE
The curved brass shoulder title has a flatter curve than early issues, and was only introduced in 1903.

4 SKILLS BADGE
The crossed rifles indicate that James is a marksman. Since the Second Boer War (1899–1902), great effort was made to increase shooting skills and this badge would not have been earned easily.

5 CHEVRONS
The white inverted chevron was awarded for two years' Good Conduct. A second was awarded for five years', so I think we can reckon that he hadn't been in that long (unless he'd blotted his copy book).

A Valley Built On Mining

Rosemary Collins finds out about a project exploring the history of the Rhondda Valley

John's project aims to celebrate every dimension of the Rhondda's rich and varied history

When you hear the word Wales, what comes to mind? Coal mining, rugby, beautiful landscapes, a love of music, nonconformism? If there's one place with a truly Welsh history, it's the Rhondda Valley in the south of the country. Today, a special project is dedicated to celebrating the Rhondda's heritage.

"The Rhondda expanded incredibly rapidly in late Victorian times," says Dr John Geraint, creative director at the Rhondda Heritage Project (**rctourheritage.com/heritage-home**). "The best steam coal in the world was discovered underneath the Rhondda. That was attested to by the British Admiralty no less, who did scientific tests on it. You have this gold rush, almost, for Rhondda coal – and in the years running up to the First World War the valley's population grew more rapidly than anywhere in the world, apart from New York and Chicago. It attracted people from across the globe, primarily from North and West Wales but also from the West Country (Somerset and Gloucestershire), Spain and Italy. A real melting pot was created, because the Rhondda is a very deep, narrow valley. It runs for about 12 miles. And what was eventually created along that valley floor was, to all intents and purposes, a linear city."

The best steam coal in the world was discovered underneath the Rhondda

John works at Rhondda Radio, the valley's community radio station, which in 2023 secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of an initiative to preserve memories of Britain's mining heritage.

The first stage of the Rhondda Heritage Project involved volunteers recording local people's recollections at a series of storytelling workshops.

"With the first two that came in, I realised we were on to something very precious here. One of them was a story about a grandmother who had been involved in a very successful campaign to win pithead baths in the South Wales Coalfield. Years ago there were no showers available to colliers as they came up from underground, so they would arrive home covered in coal dust. The second story was about the welcome received by a refugee from Idi Amin's Uganda in the 1970s who arrived in the Rhondda with his family and was taken into the bosom of the local community."

Throughout 2024, Rhondda Radio has been playing local residents' stories on a weekly basis. The project has also created a Rhondda Heritage Trail, with 12 'stations' to visit focused on different topics.

John particularly likes the station dedicated to entertainment: "It celebrates not just the individual stars who came out of the Rhondda like the actor Sir Stanley Baker, but the collective music-making of brass bands and choirs and so on that ensure the Rhondda is often referred to as the valley of song."

An online video of the Treorchy Male Choir performing *Heart of the Valleys*, a song composed for the opening of the trail, has had more than 30,000 views in total, and can be seen at **youtube.com/@johnontherhondda8438**.

"The sense of community is very strong in the Rhondda still," John adds. "That community was forged as a result of its industrial past. Of course, those days have now changed and the scars of coal mining have largely disappeared. Rhondda is becoming a green valley again, and the trail celebrates that as well. One of our stations is named 'Rhondda's Green Future', where we look towards a future that is a mixture of sustainable industry and visitors who come to see the fantastic landscape."

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

Discover More

Rhondda Heritage Project
w **rctourheritage.com/heritage-home**

You can listen to local residents' memories of the Rhondda Valley and find out more about the heritage trail on the project's website.

THE BIG PICTURE

Celebrating our ancestors caught on camera

Eventually an estimated 1.5 million volunteers supplied hundreds of thousands of garments

GETTY IMAGES

Hands Across The Ocean

Celebrities perform at a charity radio broadcast in Hollywood on 31 December 1940

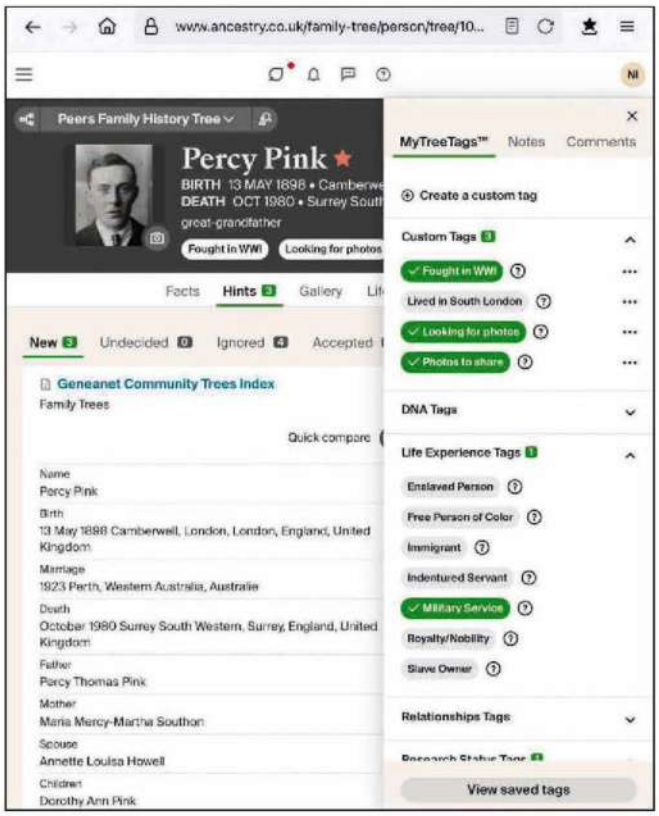
There's nothing unusual about putting on your glad rags and braving the winter weather to celebrate New Year's Eve in style, but it's a safe bet that your last end-of-year outing didn't involve anyone near the calibre of motion-picture royalty Spencer Tracy, Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney and James Cagney. For they were just some of the performers watched by the thousands of people attending this very special fundraiser, which was broadcast across the USA and had been organised by the Hollywood branch of the relief organisation Bundles for Britain.

Although the country didn't officially enter the Second World War until Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on 7 December 1941, the US government donated a massive amount of military and other supplies before then, while countless civilian volunteers also played their part. One of the most prominent was Bundles for Britain's founder, New York socialite Natalie Wales Latham.

It all began in 1940, when eager to support Britain's war effort she started a knitting circle with her friends producing woollen items to be sent abroad, such as socks, scarves, hats, gloves and sweaters. Knitters across the country flocked to the cause, while businesses donated wool and needles, and helped with distribution. "I love England," Wales Latham told Michigan newspaper *The Daily Monitor* in January 1941, "but I believe helping England as we are is serving her and serving ourselves, too."

Eventually an estimated 1.5 million volunteers supplied hundreds of thousands of garments (including secondhand items) plus medical equipment and supplies, and raised millions of dollars.

You can view newsreel footage – including Londoners trying on donated clothes – on British Pathé's website at **tinyurl.com/bp-bundles-for-britain**, and read historic newspaper coverage of the campaign's work at the Library of Congress' wonderful free site Chronicling America (**https://www.loc.gov/collections/chronicling-america**).



Organise your research with Ancestry's MyTreeTags

Nick Peers reveals how to tag the relations in your Ancestry tree to get more relevant hints

As your family tree begins to grow, it can be hard keeping track of who needs what research. Thankfully, Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) is on the case. It's recently unveiled a new tool that allows you to direct its attention to prioritise finding hints for up to 10 named relations in your tree, rather than its usual scattergun approach.

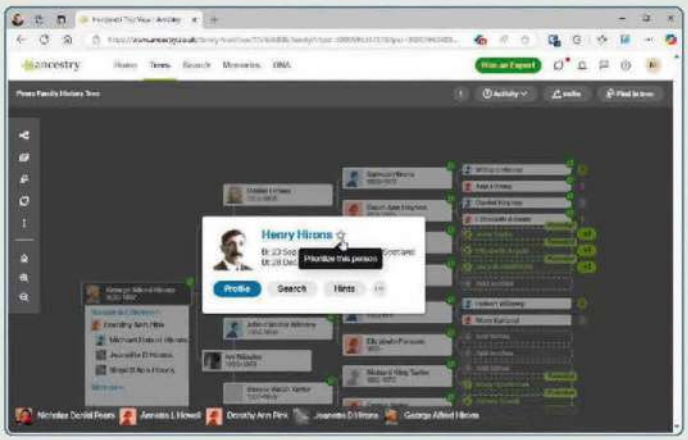
The new feature is an extension of MyTreeTags, which finally rolled out to all users at the end of October. As the name suggests, it allows you to apply a series of both standard and custom-made tags to the people in your tree, which can be used to organise your time more efficiently.

If your tree is open to public view, then those tags attached to deceased relatives can be viewed by anyone looking at your tree. If your tree is private, then only those you've given access to can view them. Note that any editors of your tree can also add their own tags and replace yours, so you might want to consider setting rules and boundaries over their use.

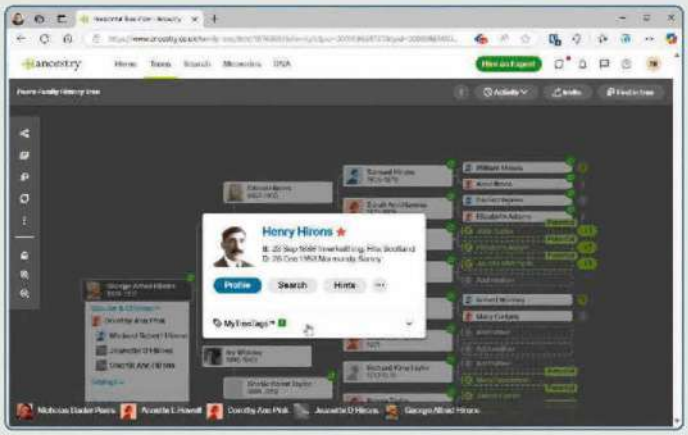
You can currently only use MyTreeTags when accessing Ancestry through your web browser – they're not yet part of the mobile app. So head to the website and log in.

TOP TIP!

Any custom tags that you create are restricted to the tree they were created in. This means that you'll have to recreate them in any other trees you have.



1 Prioritise Key Relations The new prioritisation feature is incredibly simple to use – just look for a star button next to each relation's name when you click their entry in your family tree or open their profile page. Simply click the star and it'll change to red, indicating that they're now a priority.



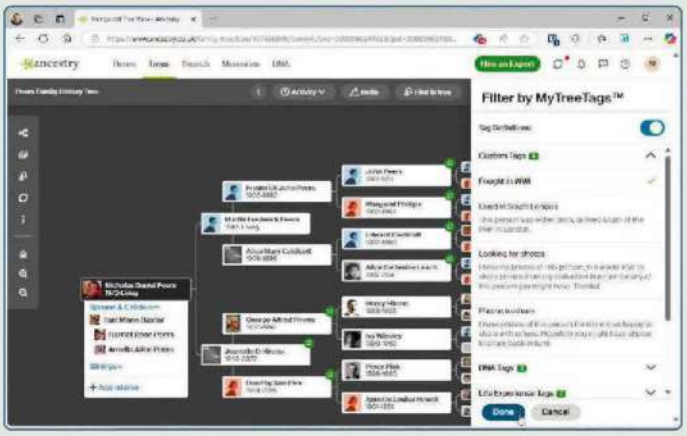
2 Confirm Your Selection Clicking the star button simply attaches a MyTreeTag called 'Prioritized Person' to their profile. While selected, Ancestry will prioritise finding hints for that relation. Up to 10 people can be prioritised at any one time – to remove the tag to free up space for another relation, click the star again.

3 View New Hints Once an individual has been prioritised, you should quickly see the benefits as Ancestry goes hunting for hints for that person. If the telltale leaf doesn't immediately appear next to their name, click the 'Hints' tab and fresh hints should appear for you to review.

4 Go Beyond Prioritisation Other MyTreeTags are also added on a person-by-person basis – there is no way to tag several people at once. Navigate to an individual's profile page and click the white tag button, next to their profile picture and relationship to you. This will open a slide-out pane on the right.

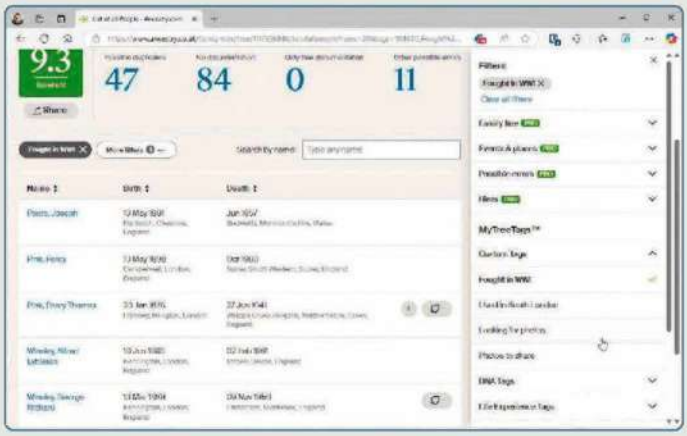
7 Edit And Delete Custom Tags The custom tags you create are entirely up to you. You could tag everyone who served in the First World War, for example, or use tags to interact with visitors to your tree (such as highlighting relations where you still need photos). Custom tags can be edited or deleted by clicking … beside their name.

5 View And Add Tags MyTreeTags splits tags into categories. Expand a category and you'll see all of the relevant tags, such as 'Actively Researching' and 'Brick Wall' under the 'Research Status Tags' category. Click one to assign it to your relative – it'll turn green in the tag list and appear next to their profile picture.



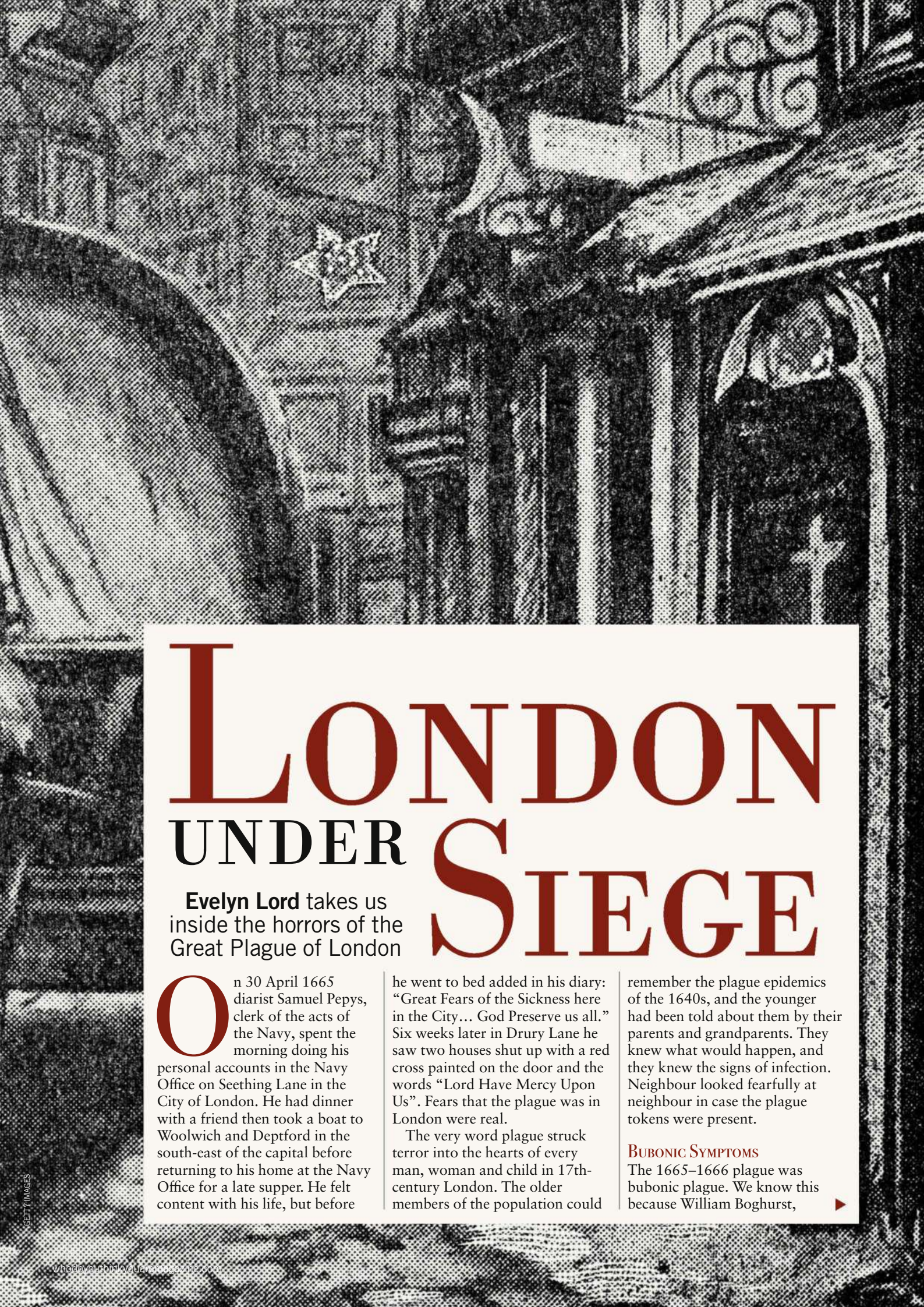
8 Filter Your Tags Once you've assigned tags, it's time to make use of them. You could quickly find people with a particular tag, for example when a new First World War record set is released. One way is to click the 'Find' button when viewing your tree. From here, click 'Filters' followed by the relevant filter(s) before clicking 'Done'.

6 Create Custom Tags You can also create your own customised tags to suit the way you work – click 'Create a custom tag' to enter a tag name (maximum 25 characters) and optional description (140 characters) that will appear when you or someone else with access to your tree clicks '?' next to that tag's name.



9 Create A Filtered List To display a list of all of the relations with a specific tag, click the 'View' button on the left of your tree and choose 'List' to view a full list of the people in your tree. Click the 'More Filters…' button and you'll see a list of MyTreeTags – select one to display a filtered list showing only those with the selected tag(s).

A cart collects the bodies of victims during the Great Plague of London



London under Siege

Evelyn Lord takes us inside the horrors of the Great Plague of London

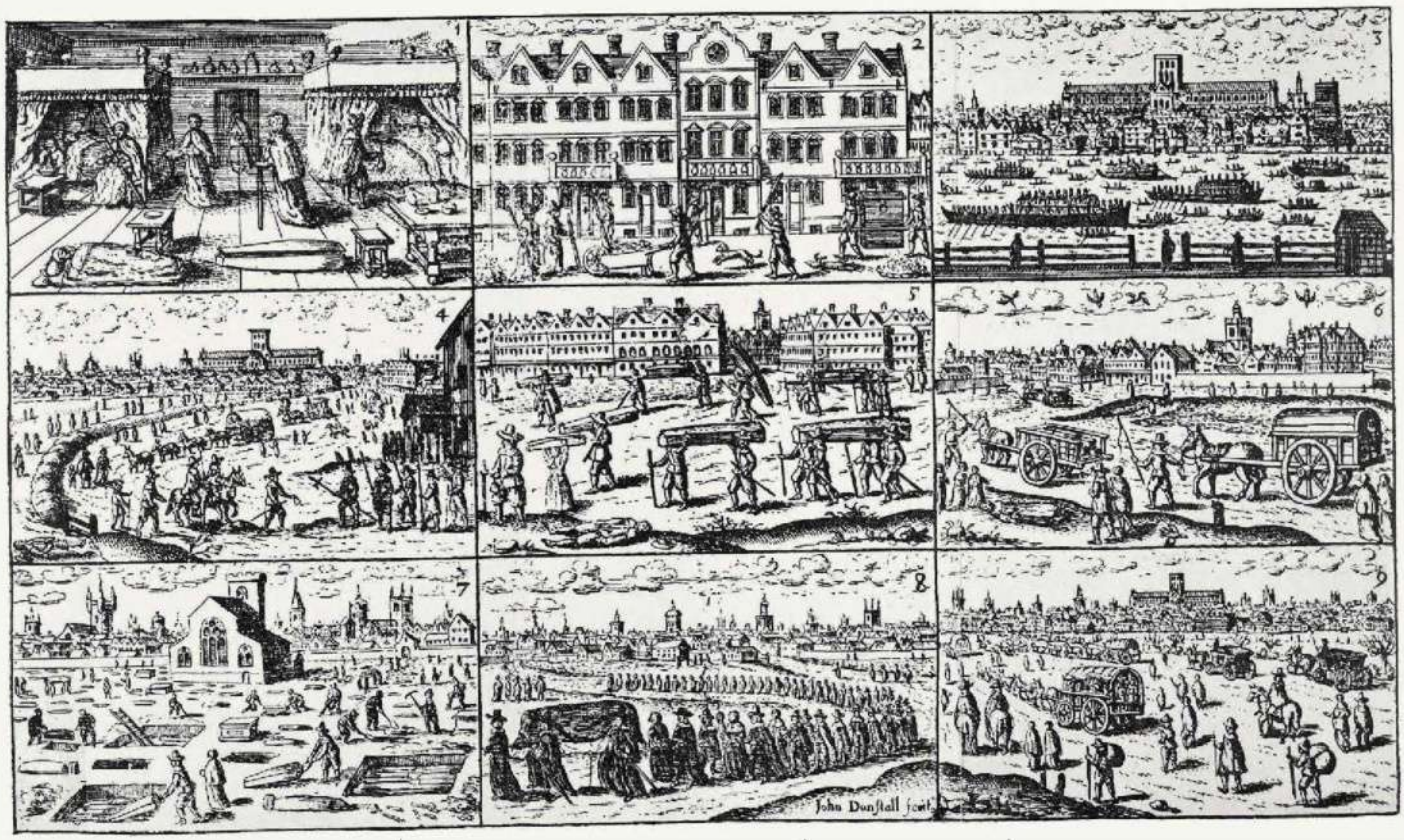
On 30 April 1665 diarist Samuel Pepys, clerk of the acts of the Navy, spent the morning doing his personal accounts in the Navy Office on Seething Lane in the City of London. He had dinner with a friend then took a boat to Woolwich and Deptford in the south-east of the capital before returning to his home at the Navy Office for a late supper. He felt content with his life, but before he went to bed added in his diary: "Great Fears of the Sickness here in the City… God Preserve us all." Six weeks later in Drury Lane he saw two houses shut up with a red cross painted on the door and the words "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us". Fears that the plague was in London were real.

The very word plague struck terror into the hearts of every man, woman and child in 17th-century London. The older members of the population could remember the plague epidemics of the 1640s, and the younger had been told about them by their parents and grandparents. They knew what would happen, and they knew the signs of infection. Neighbour looked fearfully at neighbour in case the plague tokens were present.

Bubonic Symptoms

The 1665–1666 plague was bubonic plague. We know this because William Boghurst,

GETTY IMAGES



Scenes from a contemporaneous broadsheet showing mass deaths and burials in London

an apothecary with a shop at the sign of the White Hart in the parish of St Giles in the Fields in Central London, wrote down his observations on the symptoms of plague seen on the victims he was asked to treat. He observed 20 stages of infection. These started innocently enough as symptoms for a common cold or an upset digestive system. The plague tokens appeared in stage eight – black buboes in the armpits and groin, suppurating spots all over the body, swellings in the neck and belly, blinding headaches and delirium. Once these symptoms appeared, death was usually inevitable. Boghurst added that he saw no sneezing as in the former plague epidemic. Sneezing was a symptom of pneumonic plague, which spread from person to person by droplets.

Levelling The Blame

Today we know that the bubonic plague is caused by the bacillus *Yersinia pestis*, spread by the bite of an infected black-rat flea. In the 17th century there was no such knowledge, but much speculation as to where the 1665 plague came from. Some blamed the Dutch, England's enemy at that time – many towns and villages had lost men through the Anglo-Dutch Wars, pressed to serve in the Royal Navy. But others saw it as God's judgement on the sins of humanity, while the editors of the broadsheet newspapers looked at the overcrowding, filth and poverty in towns and deemed it a disease of the poor. *The Newes* said, "The plague is in the sluttish part of the parish where the poor are crowded together, and the multitude infect one another." The most popular idea, recorded by Boghurst, was that it was caused by the earth belching venomous stinking fumes – the miasmic theory. Towns did have a smell of their own. Most

George Monck, 1st Duke Of Albermarle

1608–1670 How a "blockhead" helped to save many lives in London

Monck was the second son of an impoverished Devonshire landowner. He was a professional soldier who refused to fight in the Second English Civil War, but was instrumental in bringing about Charles II's Restoration. For his part in this he was rewarded with the dukedom of Albermarle. He married Anne Clarges, a farrier's daughter.

Once plague had been identified in London, Charles II and his court moved to Oxford. Monck volunteered to remain in the capital and set up an office in the St James Park Cockpit – previously a theatre – to make sure that the Plague Orders worked, and organise poor relief for those in need. He did this in cooperation with the lord mayor of London, with the mayor taking care of the city parishes and Monck the 'out parishes' and the west.

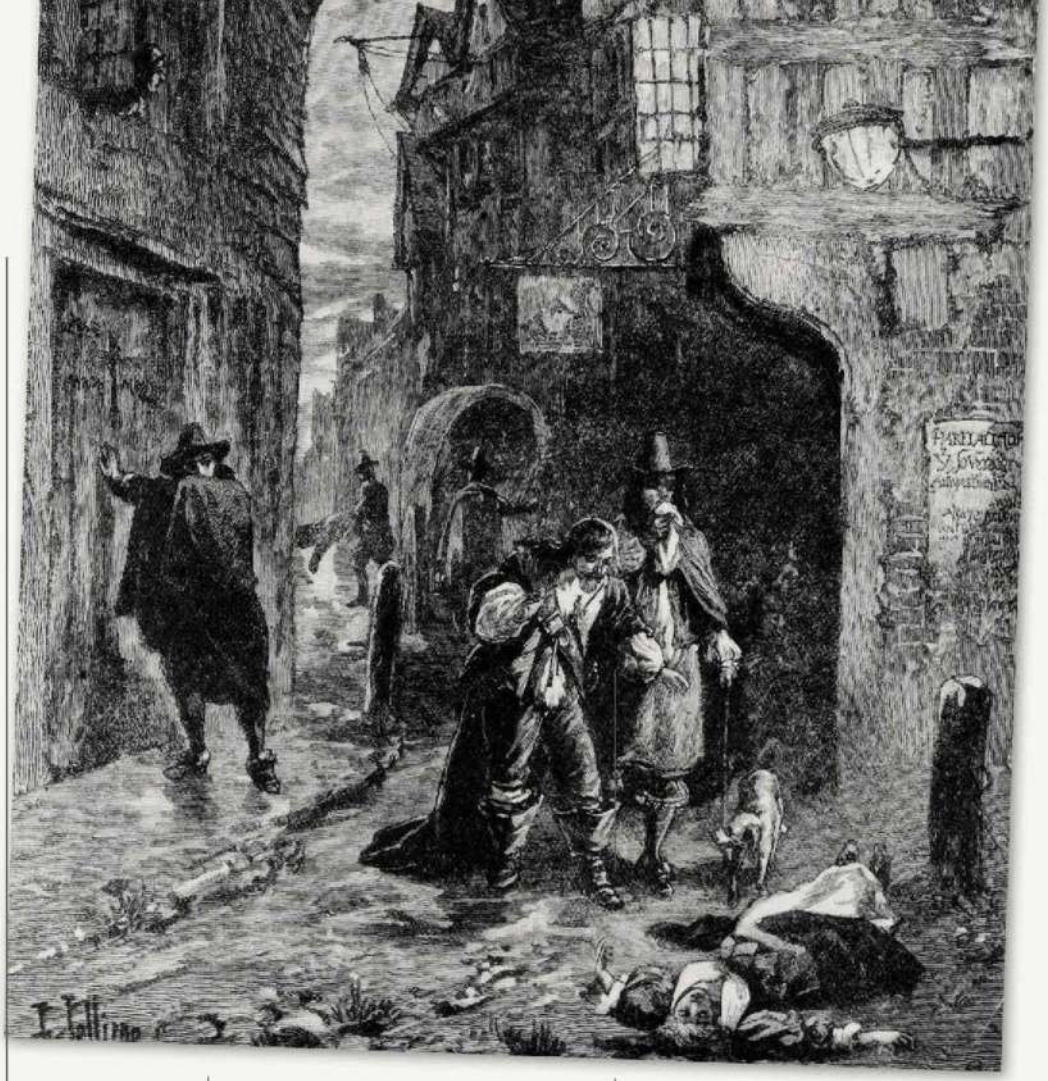
He stayed in the city until November 1666, when he was sent into the Royal Navy to continue the Second Anglo-Dutch War. Monck received no recognition for his role as the sole representative of the Government in the epicentre of the plague.

Diarist Samuel Pepys described Monck as "a dull, heavy blockhead", but honest to his country, while his wife was apparently a woman of strong opinions.

GETTY IMAGES

had at least one or two common dunghills on street corners, polluted water courses, and roads that thronged with animals.

There was no cure for the plague in the 17th century, but there were preventatives taken in the hope of staying healthy. Tobacco was thought to have excellent powers against the plague (Pepys bought a roll "to smell and chaw", and felt less apprehensive), and those burying the victims often threw their clay pipes into the graves. Other preventatives included a chemical compound known as Venetian treacle, available from apothecaries; home-made pomanders of oranges stuck with cloves; and nosegays of sweet-smelling flowers. It was also thought that catching syphilis prevented the plague, so trade at brothels increased.



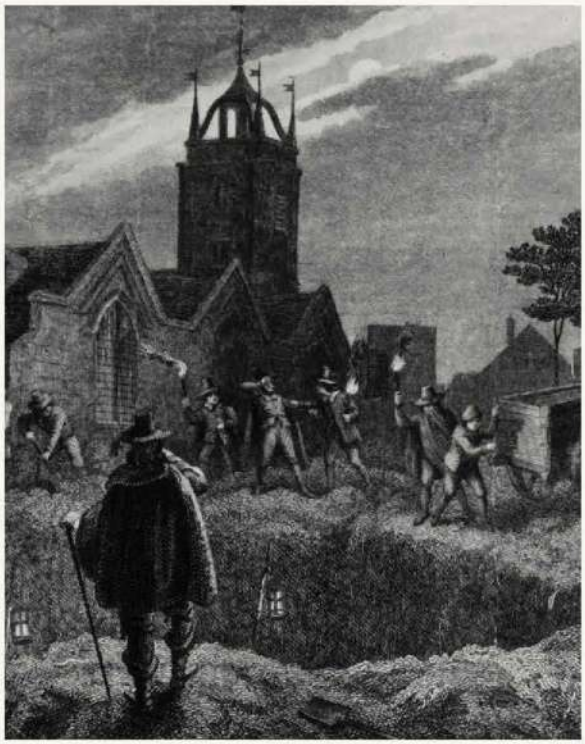
Gentlemen discover the body of a female victim of the plague

Emergency Measures

Once plague had been identified the Privy Council, a body of men appointed to advise the king, issued the Plague Orders. These 17 instructions explaining what to do when plague struck were read out in every parish church. They cancelled fairs and forbade any public meetings, instructed that streets should be cleansed and bonfires burned on street corners, and that any stray dog, cat or pigeon was to be killed, because these were seen as harbingers.

The orders also defined how and where plague victims would face death. In the early stages of the epidemic, victims were removed from their homes and taken to the local 'pest house' for isolation – most towns had at least one. Harrowing as it was to remove the sufferers, especially children, in some towns the victims had a chance of survival. The Corporation Common Day Book for Cambridge, recording the decisions of formal meetings, shows that the town had four pest houses and refurbished these in 1658, rebuilding them in brick as two-roomed cottages each with its own hearth. A doctor was employed to care for the sick, and servants to prepare the food.

Pest houses quickly became full, and the Privy Council orders stated that the infected were instead to be shut up in their houses with their households for three weeks. In theory, a watchman was posted outside to stop anyone escaping. The London physician Dr Nathanial Hodges wrote that the plight of the living shut up with the dying was inexpressible. Death usually came as delirium which caused the dying to get up and stagger around until falling down dead. There was little escape for the living incarcerated with the infected. Whole families died.



A plague pit in Aldgate, based on an illustration by George Cruikshank (1792–1878)

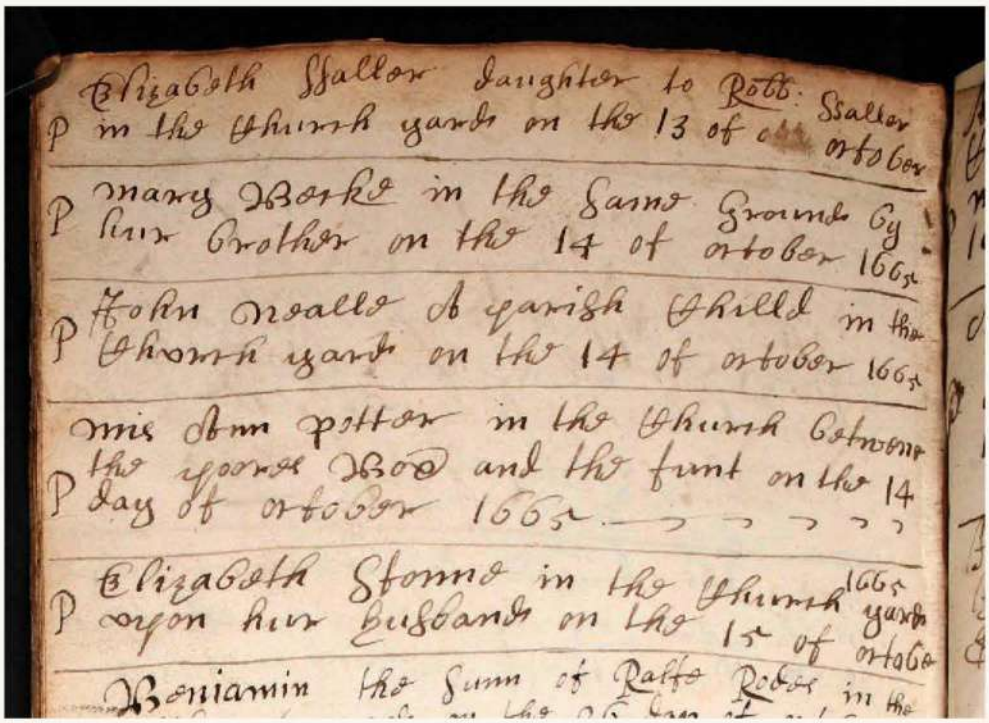
GETTY IMAGES

Full Churchyards

Once the victim was dead, the corpse was pushed out into the street. The diarist and horticulturist John Evelyn described driving in his coach through Deptford in 1665, and seeing bodies and coffins lying on the ground. The churchyards were full. Bodies were buried in mass graves at night without any ceremony. So far 22 plague pits have been identified in London.

By September the city was recording nearly 8,000 deaths a week in its bills of mortality, and the plague had spread – up the Old North Road, into East Anglia, west to Dorset and Bristol, into the Midlands and along the Thames. Towns tried to stop travellers entering without a pass showing that they were clear of the plague, but without success.

Local outbreaks can be traced in parish registers indicated by ▶



Contemporary burial records often marked plague victim deaths with a 'p'

an unusual number of burials, or burials marked with a "p.", or the words "Pest", "Infection" or "Here begins the plague". The deaths of those sent to the pest house were usually entered in their parish of origin, but in some parishes the clerk gave up and simply entered numbers.

False Hope

Towards the end of 1665 the plague deaths recorded in the bills of mortality for London and other towns began to decrease, and by the spring of 1666 it looked as if the country was clear of the plague. But this was not the case. As the weather grew warmer, the plague reappeared. Towns and villages not infected in 1665 succumbed, and families who had survived in 1665 now caught the infection and died.

It was not until November 1666 that any significant change in the number of plague deaths can be noted. By January 1667 most towns and villages were clear.

The London bills of mortality recorded 68,596 plague deaths in 1665 and 28,710 in 1666, but the final total was probably more like 111,000. Deaths in Norwich exceeded 2,000 and in Colchester 4,000, and smaller towns lost about a third of their population.

Behind these numbers were real people. Widows were left without husbands, children without their parents, and the elderly with no younger relations to care for them. Our own relations lost members of their family, friends and neighbours. It is from the numbers of hearths that depopulation by the plague can be seen. The hearth tax was first assessed in 1662. If the 1664 figures are compared with the 1667 assessment then the number of empty houses and missing entries together give a graphic account of unoccupied houses.

Cities and larger towns recovered their population numbers within about two years, as gaps were filled by country folk looking for work. Smaller towns took longer to recover.

However, there was hope for a better future when the plague ended. Parish registers show an increase in marriages from November 1666 to March 1667. Babies were born to families who had lost children. Fairs and markets returned, children played in the streets, and neighbours met up without the fear of infection.

The end of the Great Plague is attributed to many different causes, but it is possible that the population built up an immunity, since it was the last in a long sequence of plague epidemics.

EVELYN LORD is a local historian, author and emeritus fellow of Wolfson College Cambridge

Resources

Take your research further

ARCHIVES

THE LONDON ARCHIVES

a **40 Northampton Road, London ECIR 0HB**
t 020 7332 3820
e *ask@tla.libanswers.com*
w **thelondonarchives.org**

TLA has the parish registers for the City of London and the old counties of London and Middlesex, but not Westminster. Those for south of Oxford Street are in the Westminster Archives (**tinyurl.com/west-arch**). Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) is the best online source of London parish registers.

WELLCOME COLLECTION

a **183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE**
t 020 7611 2222
e *info@wellcomecollection.org*
w **wellcomecollection.org**

The collection includes books, images, medical records, and London bills of mortality. Some material can be seen at **tinyurl.com/wellcome-plague**.

BOOKS

A Journal of the Plague Year
Daniel Defoe
E Nutt, 1722

This fictional account from the author of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is based on London's bills of mortality and survivors' memories. It's available on Project Gutenberg (**gutenberg.org/ebooks/376**).

The Great Plague
Evelyn Lord
Yale University Press, 2014

A paperback edition of Evelyn's people's history came out in 2023. It is based on a range of sources including parish registers, bills of mortality, and the records of Cambridge University.

WEBSITE

THE DIARY OF SAMUEL PEPYS

w **pepysdiary.com**

Search and read the annotated text of Pepys' diary, including his account of the Great Plague.

GETTY IMAGES

MERCHANDISE

BACK ISSUES

If you've missed an issue, here's a chance to complete your collection – and find out how to subscribe on page 22

Issue 220
AUGUST 2024
- Best free websites
- Scottish marriages
- Sporting ancestors
- South Yorkshire

Issue 221
SEPTEMBER 2024
- *WDYTYA?* turns 20
- Irish Famine
- Royal Navy
- Bedfordshire kin

Issue 222
OCTOBER 2024
- Grow your tree
- Second Boer War
- Jamaican research
- County Durham

Issue 223
NOVEMBER 2024
- Online newspapers
- Methodist relations
- Scottish deaths
- East Sussex kin

Issue 224
DECEMBER 2024
- First World War medical records
- DNA advice
- Northamptonshire

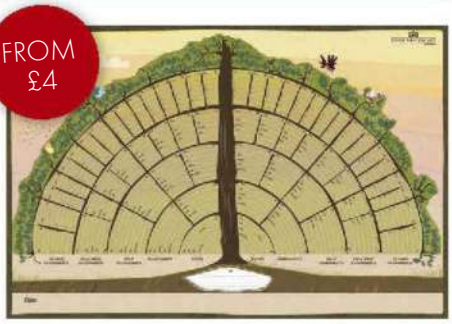
FROM £4.79

Issue 225
CHRISTMAS 2024
- Census websites
- RNLI records
- Irish schools
- Herefordshire kin

WALL CHART

Commemorate your family tree with our wall chart

FROM £4

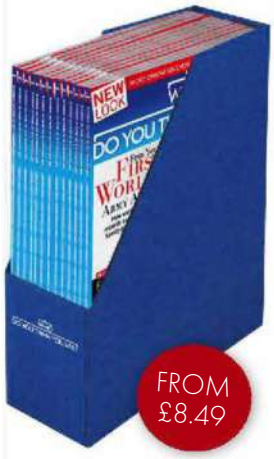


Share your family history with your loved ones by displaying it on our popular wall chart, which measures 864 x 572mm. It is printed on thick, matt paper and comes folded.

MAGAZINE STORAGE

Order a file today to preserve your issues

Keep your collection of *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* in perfect condition by ordering one of our files. Each one stores a year's worth of magazines, and is suitable for issues dated November 2018 onwards.



FROM £8.49

CERTIFICATE BINDER

Keep your precious archive safe for posterity

FROM £12

OUT OF STOCK

PLUS ORDER A PACK OF 10 ACID-FREE WALLETS FOR JUST £5

Store your certificates away safely in an exclusive *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* certificate binder, which includes five acid-free plastic A4 wallets to protect your most valuable documents.

SUBSCRIBERS! LOG IN & **SAVE UP TO 25%**

	SUBSCRIBER*			NON-SUBSCRIBER		
	UK	EUROPE	R.O.W.	UK	EUROPE	R.O.W.
BACK ISSUES	£4.79	£5.59	£6.39	£5.99	£7.35	£8.35
CERTIFICATE BINDER	£12	£14.25	£15	£16	£19	£20
	CODE WHCERTBIDA					
WALL CHART	£4	£5	£5	£5	£5	£5
	CODE WHWALLA					
MAGAZINE STORAGE	£8.49	£9.45	£10.80	£9.99	£10.50	£12
	CODE WHMAGBOXA					

CALL **03330 162120**

OR VISIT **OURMEDIASHOP.COM/BACKISSUES-WDYTYA**

OR **OURMEDIASHOP.COM/OFFERS/MERCHANDISE** FOR WALL CHARTS, STORAGE AND BINDERS

*You will need your subscriber number to access discounts online and by phone. UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed-line numbers (starting 01 or 02) and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff). Outside of free call packages call charges from mobile phones will cost between 3p and 55p per minute. Lines are open Monday to Friday 9am–5pm. If calling from overseas, call +44 1604 973728

'I Solved A Victorian Illegitimacy Case'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Using lateral thinking and DNA colour-coding, Jenny May Forsyth was able to discover the truth behind her great great grandmother's birth. She explained her sleuthing to **Gail Dixon**

Louisa Chace, my great great grandmother, was born in 1850 at the General Lying-In Hospital in Lambeth, South London. She grew up with her grandparents Richard and Mary Chace in Bermondsey and Islington, with no obvious mother mentioned on the census returns. By the time she was an adolescent she appeared to have lost her entire immediate family.

At the age of 17, Louisa gave birth to a son, my great grandfather John May. She wasn't married to John's father Henry May at the time, but they wed a year later in 1869.

Henry was killed in a tragic accident just three months after they married. While working as a carpenter on a building site in Hornsey, North London, he was shot through the heart by Henry Tucker, his brother-in-law and fellow carpenter who had been messing around with a gun that he didn't know was loaded. He must have been devastated.

Louisa worked as a dressmaker and needlewoman to support her son. She married a second time in 1875 to William Skinner, and they had three children.

JENNY MAY FORSYTH lives in Bristol and works as a freelance editor for TV and magazines

My Brick Wall

The huge stumbling block in my research centred on Louisa's birth record. I was looking for a Louisa Chace born c1850 in London, but I couldn't pin her down in the records. On both her marriage certificates, Louisa named her father as "John Chace, mariner", which eventually turned out to be a red herring.

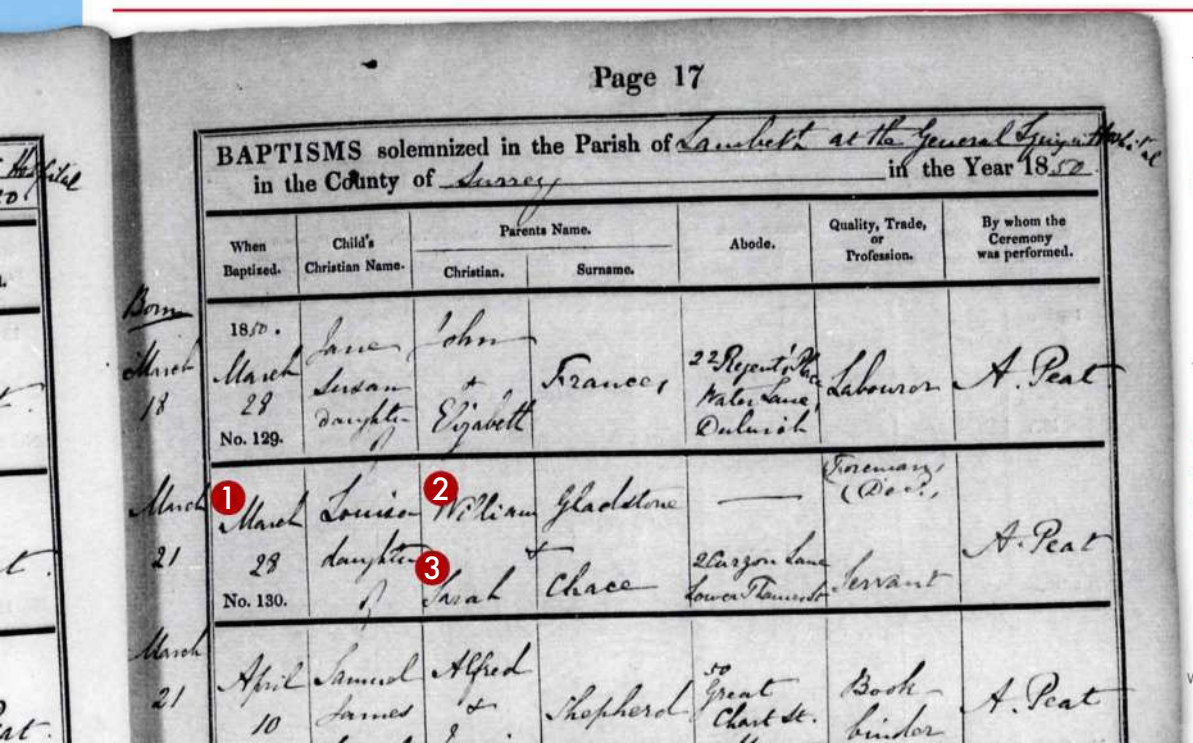
I tried for ages to assemble a family with John Chace as the father, but nothing tied together. Finally, I deciphered who Louisa was by building trees for all of the Louisa Chaces who were born in London c1850. There were three, and I eliminated two by tracing their lives forward.

Crucial Discovery

In 2020, while searching on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), I found

Baptism Register, 1850

This key document provided intriguing clues in Jenny's search for Louisa Chace's father



Page 17

BAPTISMS solemnized in the Parish of Lambeth at the General Lying-in Hospital in the County of Surrey in the Year 1850

When Baptized.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents Name. Christian.	Parents Name. Surname.	Abode.	Quality, Trade, or Profession.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
Born March 18 — 1850. March 28 No. 129.	Jane Susan daughter	John & Elizabeth	Francis	22 Regent's Place Water Lane Dulwich	Labourer	A. Peat
March 21 — 1 March 28 No. 130.	Louisa daughter	2 William & 3 Sarah	Gladstone & Chace	— 2 Curzon Lane Lower Tooting	Foreman (Dec.) Servant	A. Peat
March 21 — April 10	Samuel James	Alfred &	Shepherd	50 Great Chart St.	Book binder	A. Peat

1 When Baptised Jenny's great great grandmother was baptised on 28 March 1850.

2 Father Louisa's father is recorded here as a deceased foreman named William Gladstone – contrasting with "John May, mariner" on her marriage certificates.

3 Mother The register also gives the name of Louisa's mother, Sarah Chace, and her occupation.

This photo of Louisa Skinner née Chace was taken c1915

SHIELA BROOMFIELD

a baptism register for a Louisa born to Sarah Chace and William Gladstone. This was a giant missing piece of the puzzle.

Richard and Mary Chace, Louisa's grandparents, had a daughter called Sarah who lived with the family in the 1861 census. I'd originally assumed that she was Louisa's aunt.

By this point I'd matched birth certificates to the other two Louisa Chaces, so I was sure that this was my ancestor. Chace was her maternal surname, not her father's, which meant that Louisa was illegitimate.

The baptism register records her as Louisa Gladstone, so no wonder I couldn't find her by searching for 'Chace'. William was listed as "foreman, dec'd", so I wondered if he hadn't had a chance to marry Sarah. I later discovered that he was already married to a woman called Charlotte Webb, with whom he had several children.

So, "John Chace, mariner", who Louisa had named in her marriage records, was a fiction. Did Sarah invent him to explain her father's absence from her life?

Louisa named her eldest son John, which implies that she believed the story to be true. She travelled to Canada in 1920, and must have got a shock when she needed a copy of her birth certificate to get a passport.

New Breakthrough

I was searching for Louisa's father now, but I couldn't find a William Gladstone, foreman, deceased for love nor money. Knowing that records were often transcriptions of the spoken word, I wondered if Louisa's father's name only sounded like Gladstone.

I always colour-code my DNA connections on Ancestry, and use yellow for the May/Chace line. I give that colour to AncestryDNA members with whom I share relevant common ancestors.

Then I look at shared matches on this line without specified common ancestors, and attribute yellow to them. This makes it clear which branch of my tree connects us, even though I can't identify common ancestors.

I decided to look at large trees within this 'yellow' group for names phonically similar to 'Gladstone', and found a William Gadsdon on one of the trees.

He was a foreman who lived in Bethnal Green in East London, not far from Sarah who worked as a servant near the Tower of London. He died in autumn 1849 during a cholera epidemic when Sarah was pregnant with Louisa.

Could he be Louisa's father? I popped his name into the father field of Louisa's Ancestry profile, and 15 new DNA connections appeared in ThruLines.

I've started my research into William's life and discovered that his forebears worked in the textile industry in Spitalfields and Shoreditch, which I'm keen to explore. I've also contacted some of his descendants, who've been very welcoming and helpful.

I feel so pleased – and amazed – to have solved these mysteries. I'm lucky that William's descendants are on Ancestry and that we have the DNA technology that makes such a discovery possible.

HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Reader Tips

Jenny shares the benefits of her hard-won research experience

- Be prepared to do extra work, such as building trees to eliminate people.
- Colour-code your AncestryDNA matches so that you can assign them to family lines.
- Images of records may contain inaccuracies that have been caused by mistranscription.

Book your 2025 break early

With Parkdean Resorts you can choose from a huge range of stunning holiday locations across the UK.

Save up to 10% on Parkdean Resorts holidays, or 5% off during school and bank holidays

Parkdean
Resorts
To redeem the offer, visit the link
below and use code CWDT33
parkdeanresorts.co.uk/partnerships/
parkdean-rewards

Around Britain

Wiltshire

Jonathan Scott tracks down the latest resources if you have Wiltshire roots

A paraglider soars over the Westbury White Horse on Salisbury Plain

Every hamlet, village and town in Wiltshire seems to be teeming with history. For example, archaeological evidence shows that the settlement Upper Minety in the village of Minety was once home to a thriving pottery industry. Until the mid-19th century Minety was also unique in that most of the parish lay in Gloucestershire, while the small area centred on St Leonard's Church was in Wiltshire. Around the same time that the entire parish became part of Wiltshire in 1844, its economy was boosted by the arrival of the Great Western Railway's line, only to shrink again when the train station closed in the 1960s.

The Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham (**wshc.org.uk**) opened its doors in 2007. Alongside genealogical sources sit items documenting firms, pioneers and famous locals. These range from documents like the 'Seymour Deed' – the marriage settlement of Jane Seymour and Henry VIII in 1536, which granted her property in Essex, Herefordshire, Southwark and Surrey – to one-offs, like an album of photographs relating to Mildred Mary Bruce (1895–1990), a record-breaking driver, speedboat racer and aviator.

Most of the parish registers at the centre are available via Ancestry

The Windrush Remembered

From 2018 staff took part in the Wiltshire Remembers the Windrush Generation project, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of the arrival of HMT *Empire Windrush* at the Port of Tilbury. Part of the output is a fascinating database of references that document a "narrative of early black presence in Wiltshire".

One example comes from an article published in the *Wiltshire Times* newspaper in 1944, describing how Jamaican RAF personnel in Chippenham were turned away from a dance following a match between Chippenham Town Football Club and the RAF. Apparently the doorman responsible claimed that he had been instructed by members of the US military to bar entry to any African Caribbean/American servicemen. In response the club and residents organised a second match, complete with post-match entertainment.

GETTY IMAGES

Free Online Records

War Diaries from both world wars, transcriptions of parish registers, historic maps, directories and records of apprenticeships make up this month's brilliant selection

Apprentice Records
w tinyurl.com/wrs-digital

Free volumes from Wiltshire Record Society's site include *Wiltshire Apprentices and Their Masters, 1710–60, Two Sixteenth-Century Taxation Lists, 1545 and 1576* and *Gleanings from Wiltshire Parish Registers.*

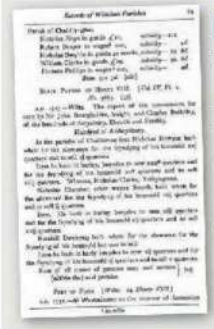
Maps
w kypwest.org.uk

Wiltshire is included in the project Know Your Place – West of England. You can explore historic maps, or select information layers to find tithe awards, postcards, photos and drawings.

War Diaries
w tinyurl.com/ward-diaries

The website of The Rifles Berkshire And Wiltshire Museum has searchable War Diaries from the world wars.

Directories
w tinyurl.com/wilts-com



The site Wiltshire Community History has information about local parishes. The digitised books include directories from 1880 and 1915.

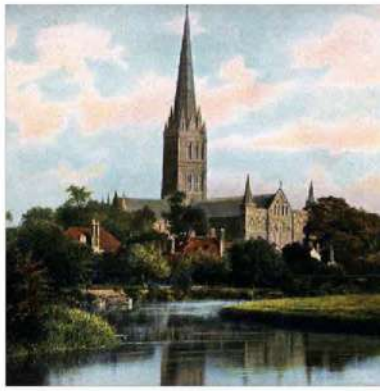
Parish Registers
w freereg.org.uk

Wiltshire's coverage here is fairly modest compared with some counties, but includes 61,798 baptisms, 35,161 burials and 81,684 marriages.

Earlier examples include a will from 1798, in which Adam Williamson leaves Elizabeth Pearce "a Black, formerly a servant in the family" a sum of £10 plus a £10 annuity for the rest of her life. And there's a *Salisbury Journal* story from October 1810, which references the death of "Anthony, the well-known cook at the Antelope Inn", where he had spent most of his life "having been fostered and supported by the late Mrs Best and family, when a helpless and nearly destitute child of colour".

Survivors of the sinking of HMT *Empire Windrush* arrive at RAF Lyneham in 1954

GETTY IMAGES



The foundation stones for Salisbury Cathedral were laid in 1220

Much-Improved Facilities

Following a five-week closure the centre's searchroom reopened in January with larger desks, more power points for laptops, and more spaces in the Local Studies Library area, including an audiovisual station for viewing DVDs, VHS tapes and listening to oral history recordings on cassette. There is also a new study area for consulting transcripts and finding aids, including parish indexes from Wiltshire Family History Society (**wiltshirefhs.co.uk**), Poor Law records, a quarter-session calendar of prisoners, a petty-session index and marriage-licence bonds.

The archive holds parish registers from across the county, most of which are available via Ancestry. These include a combined baptisms, marriages and burials collection covering 1538–1812 and containing some 3.7 million names: **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61187/**. There are further baptism and burial datasets (1813–1922) as well, with marriages and banns (1754–1916) and nonconformist records (1704–1987).

As the principal depository for the Diocese of Salisbury, the centre has church-court records, which cover everything from local disputes to non-attendance at church, and visitation records, which can reveal details of the ▶

The magnificent Palladian Bridge and Pantheon in the garden at the Stourhead Estate

LOCAL INDUSTRY

The Swindon Works Did your relation help keep GWR's trains running?

Broad gauge locomotives at the Swindon Works, 1892

The Swindon Works was opened by the Great Western Railway in 1843, becoming the main maintenance centre for the region until its closure in 1986. STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway, located in the town, has a Swindon Works Collection including order ledgers, accident reports, staff registers, and metal tokens known as 'checks' or 'cheques' that staff had to use to clock in and out or collect their pay (**steam-museum.org.uk/collection/swindon-works/**). Meanwhile the county archive looks after personnel and pension records from the railway company.

behaviour of certain members of the parish. There's also a large collection of probate material, some of which is available to search via Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61333/**).

First World War Tribunals

The centre's principal archivist Ally McConnell says that over the next couple of years staff will be working with a group of volunteers to index a collection of First World War tribunal records, creating a database of all those who applied for exemption from conscription.

"Wiltshire's tribunal records are some of the most numerous that survive for the country, and contain details about local working and domestic life in the last two years of the war. Although it depends on funding, we hope that this work can be part of a wider national project to enable comparisons of data from records of tribunals across England and Wales."

If you're looking for evidence of your ancestor's employment, the centre has records of several larger cloth manufacturers, as well as a vast collection relating to the Great Western Railway.

The local-history collection at Swindon's central library may also prove useful. It has material relating to Bristol-based Wills Tobacco, which built a factory in the town in 1915 that was promptly commandeered as a munitions factory for the remainder of the war. Wills was a major local employer, producing millions of cigarettes under brand names such as Woodbine, Capstan, Embassy and Gold Flake until the factory ceased production in 1987.

In 1941 a Vickers facility at South Marston began production of RAF Masters, the planes in which many Spitfire and Hurricane pilots learned their trade. By 1942 it was also producing Stirling bombers.

New Business Collections

Ally reveals that the centre has taken in a number of new collections relating to industry in and around Melksham and Bradford-on-Avon.

"The most recent deposit is from Cooper Tires' factory in Melksham, which closed in December last year – one of a group of companies that have shut down in the area and transferred their records to us."

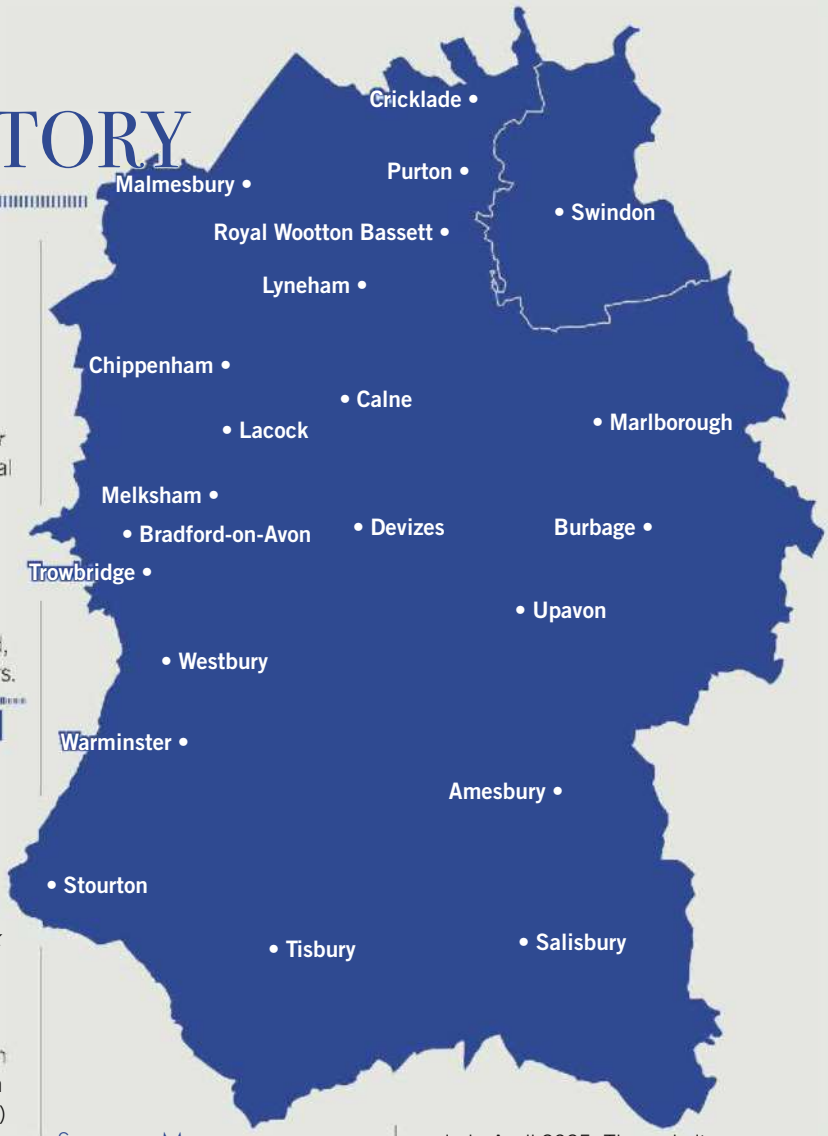
Finally the archive's staff are planning to run a project with the town's local-history society and museum to catalogue the collections and collect oral histories from locals. "We haven't applied for the funding yet," Ally explains, "but now that we've received the final deposit we are in a position to ensure that we apply for the right amount."

TOP TIP!

The county archive holds Bishops' Transcripts for Wiltshire, Berkshire and Dorset. Bristol Archives has some later BTs from parishes now in the Bristol Diocese: **tinyurl.com/bristol-archives**.

GETTY IMAGES

WILTSHIRE DIRECTORY



ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Wiltshire And Swindon History Centre

a **Cocklebury Road, Chippenham SN15 3QN**
t 01249 705500
e *archives@wiltshire.gov.uk*
w **wshc.org.uk**

The centre is home to registers and parish-chest material, plus records relating to courts, schools, hospitals and businesses. Staff offer a paid research service (from £36 an hour) for family, local or house history. Thanks to a partnership with Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), you can search through more than 6.8 million names in parish and probate material. The local-studies collection consists of books, images, documents and maps, directories, newspapers on microfilm, ephemera and audiovisual material.

Historic England Archive

a **The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EH**
t 01793 414600
e *archive@historicengland.org.uk*
w **historicengland.org.uk/images-books/archive/**

The archive looks after more than 12 million photos, drawings and reports. You can explore much of the material online, including over 400,000 digitised aerial photos.

Salisbury Cathedral Archives

a **6 The Close, Salisbury SP1 2EF**
t 01722 555120
e *collections@salcath.co.uk*
w **salisburycathedral.org.uk/discover/library-and-archive/**

The archive has medieval deeds and leases relating to properties in Salisbury, royal charters (including the 1215 Magna Carta), as well as some baptism, marriage and burial registers.

Swindon Central Library

a **Regent Circus, Swindon SN1 1QG**
t 01793 463238
e *localstudies@swindon.gov.uk*
w **tinyurl.com/swindon-library-local**

The local-studies collection is located on the second floor of the library where visitors can access General Register Office birth, marriage and death indexes; electoral rolls and poll books; newspapers including the *Swindon Evening Advertiser* and *North Wiltshire Herald*; local census records with surname and street indexes; parish registers; Bishops' Transcripts; and staff newsletters from local firms including Austin Rover, turntable manufacturer Garrard, GWR, Wills Tobacco and Vickers.

GROUPS & SOCIETIES

Wiltshire Family History Society

a **Unit 3, Bath Road Business Centre, Bath Road, Devizes SN10 1XA**
t 01380 724379
e *research@wiltshirefhs.co.uk*
w **wiltshirefhs.co.uk**

Branch meetings take place at various locations, and the website includes some research aids open to all. Society data on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) includes a countywide index of memorial inscriptions, a tithe award register (1813–1882), asylum records (1789–1921), quarter-session calendars (1728–1890), removal orders (1670–1890), First World War hospital records, and Sarum marriage-licence bonds (1604–1837).

Wiltshire Record Society

w **wiltshirerecordsociety.org.uk**

The society was founded in 1937, and its first volume was edited by RB Pugh – later the general editor of the Victoria County History. All volumes, apart from those published in the past several years, can be downloaded for free via the 'Digital Archive' page.

MUSEUMS

REME Museum

a **Calne Road, Lyneham, Chippenham SN15 4XX**
t 01249 894869
e *enquiries@rememuseum.org.uk*
w **rememuseum.org.uk**

Here you can explore the rich history of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Salisbury Museum

a **The King's House, 65 The Close, Salisbury SP1 2EN**
t 01722 332151
e *museum@salisburymuseum.org.uk*
w **salisburymuseum.org.uk**

The museum includes material relating to cutlery production.

STEAM – Museum Of The Great Western Railway

a **Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EY**
t 01793 466646
e *steamlibrary@swindon.gov.uk*
w **steam-museum.org.uk**

You can learn about STEAM's archival holdings online. Some of its images can be viewed at **www.steampicturelibrary.com**.

The Rifles Berkshire And Wiltshire Museum

a **The Wardrobe, 58 The Close, Salisbury SP1 2EX**
t 07304 068136
e *marketing@thewardrobe.org.uk*
w **thewardrobe.org.uk**

The museum is closed for redevelopment but due to open again in April 2025. The website includes a surname search tool and transcribed War Diaries.

Wiltshire Museum

a **41 Long Street, Devizes SN10 1NS**
t 01380 727369
e *archive@wiltshiremuseum.org.uk*
w **wiltshiremuseum.org.uk**

Here you'll find parish register transcriptions, memorial inscriptions, newspapers and electoral registers. There are plans to convert the derelict Devizes Assize Court into a new home for the museum.

WEBSITES

Duncan & Mandy

w **oodwooc.co.uk/Index.htm**

This couple have taken more than 61,000 photos of gravestones, memorials and churches across Wiltshire. A series of indexes boasts 72,438 names.

Wiltshire At War

w **wiltshireatwar.org.uk**

Read stories involving the county from the First World War.

A music-hall star's scrapbook, 1918

Vicky Fletcher from Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service shows us a drag performer's scrapbook Interview By Rosemary Collins

Our ancestors flocked to the music halls in the 19th and early 20th centuries to enjoy songs, comedy and more. Some of the most popular acts were female and male drag performers. Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, at The Hive in Worcester, has a unique collection belonging to Vesta Tilley, one of the biggest male impersonators of the day. Vicky Fletcher, archivist and community project officer at the service, tells us more about one of the items – a scrapbook Vesta kept recording her career.

Vesta was as huge as any of our modern pop stars until her retirement

Who Was Vesta Tilley?

Vesta Tilley was born Matilda Alice Powles in Worcester in 1864. Her father William worked at Royal Worcester Porcelain, but he was also a performer and encouraged her early career. She made her stage debut at the age of three, at the Theatre Royal in Gloucester, where William was chairman at the time. Vesta, who was known as 'The Great Little Tilley' (Tilley being an abbreviation of Matilda), was eager to perform, and was soon receiving requests from many venues around the country. She toured in the USA at least twice as well as continually in Britain, from the age of about seven years old.

She was particularly well known for her work as a male impersonator, often performing in top hat and tails or dressed as a soldier during the First World War, when she spent time campaigning for new recruits to the services and working tirelessly for charities, particularly for injured servicemen. Vesta adopted drag early in her career, when one night William found her trying on his coat and top hat and decided to get her a suit of men's clothes. From then on, new songs were found for her to perform that were thought more suited to male attire, and she first appeared in drag at Day's Concert Hall in Birmingham. As her career grew, she performed male roles exclusively, and reflected in later life that this was how she felt she could best express herself.

In 1890 Vesta married theatre impresario Walter de Frece, who was later knighted and elected MP for firstly Ashton-under-Lyne and then Blackpool. After his retirement she lived for most of the year as Lady de Frece in Monte Carlo, and died during a visit to London in 1952, aged 88.

Can You Tell Me More About The Scrapbook?

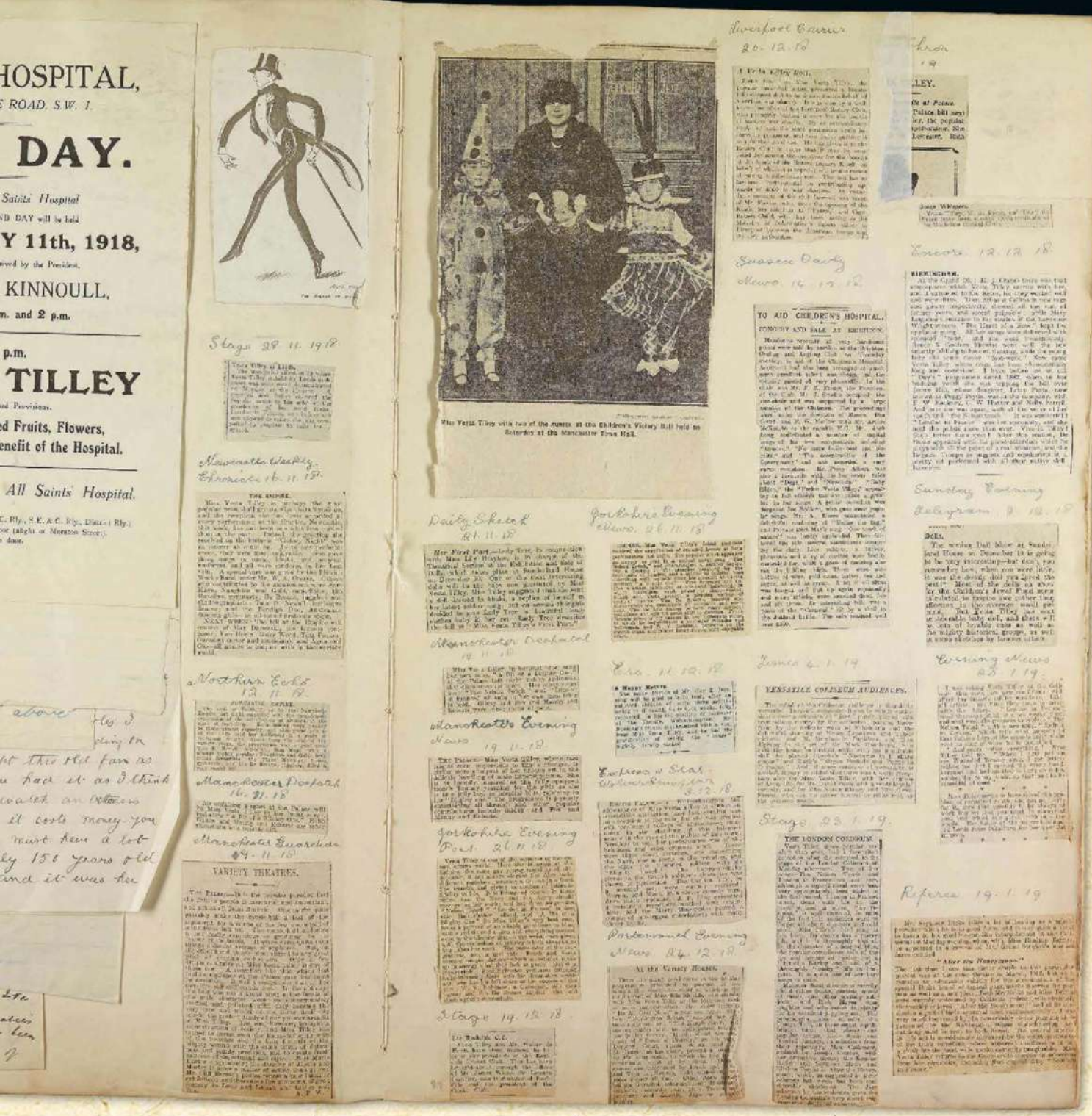
This is one of several of Vesta's personal scrapbooks held by Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (some of her costumes are preserved at the county museum at Hartlebury). They were purchased a number of years ago from a family who had bought them at an auction of material from her house around the time of her death. They remain the only known extant personal material relating to Vesta available for research and interest and are fascinating, representing as they do the very personal recollections of a star who was as huge as any of our modern pop stars until her retirement in 1920. We've had people travel from overseas to see the archive, as it is really significant for anyone studying the history of music hall in this period.

Vesta's fans were very important to her, and she compiled many scrapbooks

Visit Us

Worcestershire Archive And Archaeology Service
a The Hive, Sawmill Walk, The Butts, Worcester WR1 3PD
t 01905 822866
w **explorethepast.co.uk/contact-us/**

The archive service is open Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10am–4pm, Wednesday 1.30pm–7pm, and runs a drop-in service offering research advice on Monday 10am–4pm.



of the letters that they sent to her. The letters show the breadth of her appeal, coming from young and old, rich and poor, societies and individuals, from the UK and around the world.

The scrapbooks also contain photographs, news cuttings and playbills, so they are a real mix. They have been conserved and digitised by our in-house specialist teams, and the collection is available digitally in our Original Documents Area.

Why Did You Choose It?

It is part of a collection that has huge local, national and international significance, but is also very personal in nature – and may be something of a surprise to those unfamiliar with Vesta and her links to Worcester. Recently we were involved in a groundbreaking project called History in the Making, where participants who were new to archives drew creative inspiration from them and produced artworks, creative writing and zines. Items from the Vesta Tilley Collection were part of this, and it was fascinating to see the variety of work produced.

The collection has as wide an appeal today as she did in life. Ginny Lemon, star of *RuPaul's Drag Race UK*, found much in common with Vesta and the worlds she inhabited, and costumes from both performers have been exhibited together. Vesta's collection can help us to consider the roles of performance artists subverting gender stereotypes, and really demonstrates that archives are for everyone.

For those who would like to find out more we have created a walking trail in Worcester, details of which can be found on our website, as well as a downloadable booklet that gives further information on Vesta and the collection (**explorethepast.co.uk/2018/06/vesta-tilley-trail**).

What Other Items Does The Archive Hold?

As a county and diocesan archive we hold material filling 12 miles of shelving relating to Worcestershire's people and landscape, from the medieval period to today. This includes resources for family and local history such as maps, parish registers, wills, and family and estate collections. We also offer commercial digitisation and conservation services.

REVIEWS

The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

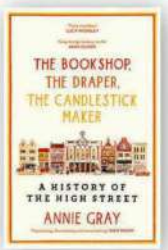
Southampton High Street in the late 19th century

SOCIAL HISTORY

The Bookshop, The Draper, The Candlestick Maker

A History Of The High Street

Annie Gray
Profile, 416 pages, £22



This wonderfully well-researched, fact-filled, quirky and humorous book charts the rise and fall of our shopping streets from the pre-1650s to the 2020s. Covering a wide breadth of trades (sadly no candlestick makers) including butchers, bakers, confectioners, tailors, innkeepers, grocers, drapers plus 'big shops' (department stores), Annie Gray explains how our streets, architecture and commodities have changed over the centuries, from medieval markets to high-street chains. We meet Burton's, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Maypole Dairies and more. You'll discover a cornucopia of information about your relatives' employment including their working practices, hours and conditions.

Each chapter deals with a different period, plus the political, social, historical and economic background that influenced trading conditions, particularly the division between rich and poor. High streets grew out of the historic markets, and declined due to the Blitz in the Second World War and the building of new shopping centres out of town, before more recently bearing the brunt of Covid-19.

Gray opens the chapters with a 'shopping list' of goods to purchase at the time. For 1750–1815 it is "Teapots for a friend, tea, a novel, Daffy's Elixir, wine biscuits and some sugar", while for 1914–1965 she chooses "A loaf of bread, a roll of film, a new suit, some sweets". She details the procurement and history for each commodity. We have 'guided walks' through towns and cities naming proprietors, how shops looked internally and externally, and how customers and staff were treated. These would be of particular interest to anyone researching their local history.

The book is lavishly illustrated throughout with maps, photographs, cartoons, trade cards, advertisements and contemporary prints. A selected bibliography offers further suggestions for research.

Adèle Emm is the author of *Tracing Your Trade and Craftsman Ancestors* (2015)

GETTY IMAGES

DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

PODCAST

WW1: Not So Quiet On The Western Front!

battleguide.co.uk/nsq

This podcast from military historians Dan Hill and Dr Spencer Jones reveals the untold stories and surprising truths of the First World War. The topics the pair have covered in recent episodes include the cavalry, the Battle of Cambrai, the food eaten in the trenches, and battlefield mapping. Free.

WATCH

Young Adults Study

youngadultsstudy.co.uk/short-films

Research psychologists based at the University of Sussex have investigated the experiences of young people who were conceived using donated sperm or eggs. They have now produced three informative short films – one for donor-conceived individuals, another for the parents of donor-conceived children, and a third that reveals the perspectives of donor-conceived young adults towards commercial DNA testing. Free.

WEBSITE

Unlocking Our Sound Heritage – Highlights

tinyurl.com/arts-cult-unlock

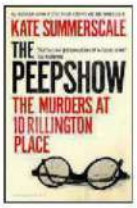
Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums is a member of Unlocking Our Sound Heritage, a British Library project to preserve the nation's sound collections. This exhibition from Google Arts & Culture features 10 clips that provide a taster of the oral history recordings that are preserved by the archive service. Free.

The Peepshow

The Murders At 10 Rillington Place

CRIME

Kate Summerscale
Bloomsbury, 320 pages, £22



In her previous books Kate Summerscale has uncovered forgotten yet fascinating stories from British history. Here she turns her attention to a more famous subject – the serial killer John Reginald Christie.

In 1953, six women's bodies were found at Christie's former flat at 10 Rillington Place, Notting Hill, West London. In 1949 Beryl Evans, another resident of 10 Rillington Place, and her baby daughter Geraldine had been murdered, and Beryl's husband Timothy was hanged for the crimes. At Christie's trial, the key question became: was he also responsible for these murders?

Although Christie's story is well known, Summerscale puts the case in a new light. She has sifted meticulously through the records, and vividly brings to life all those involved – particularly the victims, making sure that they are remembered for more than how they died. She shows that the questions surrounding the case – from how faults in the justice system allow men who commit violence against women to go uncaught, to the sometimes unethical interventions of the media in high-profile crimes – are far from the stuff of history.

This photograph of police officers searching the back garden of 10 Rillington Place was taken on 25 March 1953

Rosemary Collins is the features editor of *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*

Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

Elena A Hand Made Life

Miriam Gold
Jonathan Cape, 200 pages, £25

FAMILY BIOGRAPHY

This graphic memoir tells the life story of the author's grandmother. Elena was a Ukrainian Jew who came to Britain as a refugee before the Second World War, and found herself living in a boarding school in London for German Jewish children.

Her childhood ambition to study medicine saw her in 1936 study for six months in a cold room in the school's basement to sit the London Matriculation Examination and pass it in the highest group. A subsequent change in her circumstances saw her train, graduate and work as a radiographer. The resultant savings from her wages paid for her successful medical-school studies to become a doctor.

Elena's story gives the reader motivation to confront their circumstances and work their way through them, accepting help when needed, to reach their goals. Keep this book on your shelf. Read it as often as necessary as you face your life's challenges. It might even inspire you to write your own story to inspire future generations.

Andrew Innes, Stevenage
Andrew has been researching his own and his wife's family histories for 54 years

Join Us... Send us an email if you'd like to join our reviewing panel
e ***wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk***

GETTY IMAGES

TV & RADIO

Jonathan Wright previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

Lucy Worsley Investigates

BBC Two
Friday 3 January

How did the murders that were perpetrated by serial killer Jack the Ripper become, in the words of Lucy Worsley, "the prototype for all the true crime stories to follow"? It's a question that the historian, broadcaster and author, ever fond of challenging what we think we know about the past, answers in her latest series by turning to the diaries of a woman who lived on the other side of London from Whitechapel, and a universe away socially – Queen Victoria.

Looking over a diary entry from 4 October 1888, Worsley reveals how the killings were clearly on Victoria's mind, so much so that the monarch even telegraphed her prime minister, Lord Salisbury, to offer her thoughts on what was happening. Better lighting and better detectives were needed, she advised strongly, in a message deemed sensitive enough to send in code.

The queen's caution was probably wise. One reason that the Ripper's murders have such an abiding place in our folk memory is that they were seized on by the fast-growing newspaper industry, setting a sensationalistic template for the retelling of gory crime stories that's lasted until today.

Historian Lucy Worsley embarks on a new series of investigations in January

The other three episodes in the second series of *Lucy Worsley Investigates* offer similarly thought-provoking takes on familiar tales. The Gunpowder Plot, for instance, is here presented as a story of radicalisation and terrorism.

Further back in time, Worsley looks at the years that immediately followed William of Normandy's invasion of England in 1066. His conquest of the country, she suggests, was much more violent and protracted than the Bayeux Tapestry – a depiction of the Battle of Hastings that we can read as propaganda – might suggest.

There's also an episode examining the reign of Mary Tudor. Henry VIII's eldest daughter has gone down in history as Bloody Mary, the monarch who executed her subjects as she sought to return England to Roman Catholicism. However, could it be that her terrible reputation is rooted in simple sexism?

Jason Watkins & Lady Jane Grey: A Tower Of London Special

My5
Streaming now

In case you missed it when it aired on Channel 5 in November, it's worth seeking out this documentary in which actor and *Inside the Tower of London* narrator Jason Watkins digs into his family history. Enlisting the help of Tracy Borman, joint chief curator for Historic Royal Palaces, Watkins tries to find out if he's connected to Sir John Brydges, the tower lieutenant who oversaw the execution of the 'Nine-Day Queen', Lady Jane Grey, in 1554. The pair also follow up another family rumour: that the Watkins clan are related to Jane Austen.

The Six Triple Eight

Netflix
Streaming now

In February 1945, the overseas postal service for the US Army was in a mess. Millions of parcels and letters sent to troops in continental Europe often weren't getting any further than Birmingham (albeit the one in the West Midlands, not Alabama). There were genuine fears that the lack of communication from home was impacting on morale.

Sorting the problems was the work of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only Women's Army Corps unit of colour to serve overseas in the Second World War. Retold as a feature-length drama, it's a story of overcoming both sexism and racism that foregrounds the inspirational leadership of the indomitable Major Charity Adams, played by Kerry Washington.

Call The Midwife

BBC One
January

Details remain sketchy, but this is just a reminder that, following two Christmas episodes, *Call the Midwife* will return in the New Year. This time around, it's 1970 – but there should be a few more series yet. As the programme's creator and writer Heidi Thomas has pointed out, the order of nuns on whom the Nonnatus sisters are based worked in the East End until 1976.

SAS Rogue Heroes

BBC One
January

This popular drama series from *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight exploring the creation of the Special Air Service during the Second World War returns. For series two, the action is set not in the deserts of North Africa but Italy, which the Allies invaded in 1943. With David Stirling (Connor Swindells) having been captured, it's down to Paddy Mayne (Jack O'Connell) to lead an unconventional regiment that many in positions of power would prefer simply didn't exist.

The Last Musician Of Auschwitz

BBC Two
Monday 27 January

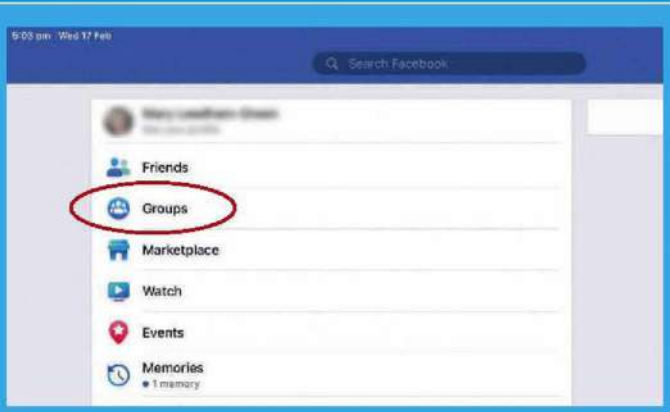
Holocaust Memorial Day takes place on 27 January every year, because on that date in 1945 soldiers of the Red Army's 322nd Rifle Division liberated Auschwitz. Scheduled for the 80th anniversary, this feature-length documentary explores how music was hugely important to prisoners at the concentration camp, acting not only as a source of much-needed solace but also a catalyst for resistance. At the heart of the film lies an interview with cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who now lives in London but believes that she only survived Auschwitz because she was a member of the women's orchestra.

BBC STUDIOS/TOM HAYWARD

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

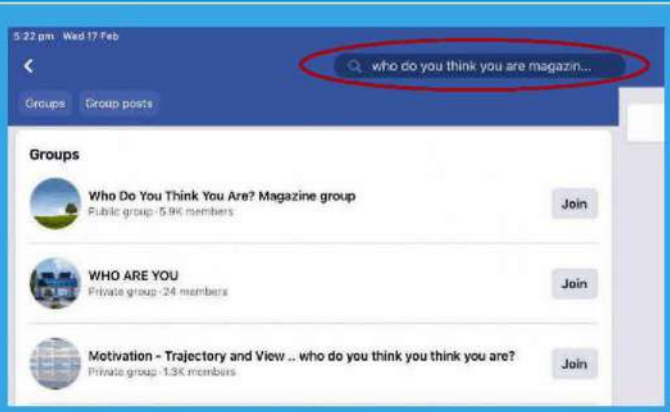
Join Our FACEBOOK GROUP

Did you know that we have a friendly Facebook Group where family historians can share new discoveries, ask for help or just chat about genealogy? If you haven't joined a Facebook Group before, don't worry, it's very simple!



1 Click On The 'Groups' Icon

From the Facebook homepage, click on the 'Groups' icon (this may be at the bottom of the screen on the mobile app or from the menu, or above your News Feed).

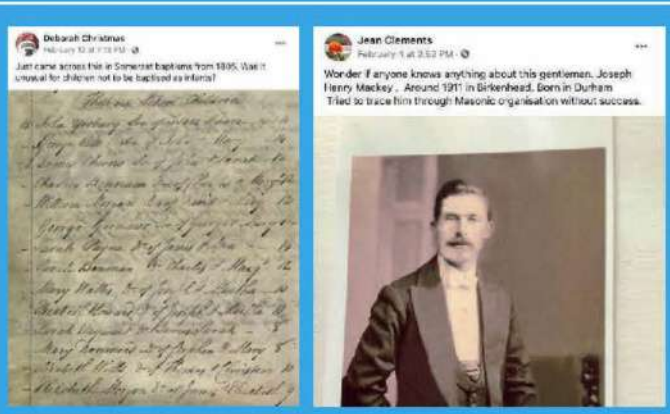


2 Search For Our Group

Search for the *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* Group (click the magnifying glass), then click 'Join' next to the name. You will need to read and agree to our rules.

3 Wait To Be Added

We are then notified, and will add you as a member as soon as possible. The group is growing rapidly, but you shouldn't have to wait too long before you're approved.



4 Start Posting!

You can either upload your own query or respond to other people's posts. It's a great way to share your love of family history and get help with your brick walls.

NEXT MONTH

Our February issue goes on sale on **28 January**

START USING TIMELINES

How a new approach could transform your research

ALSO IN THE ISSUE

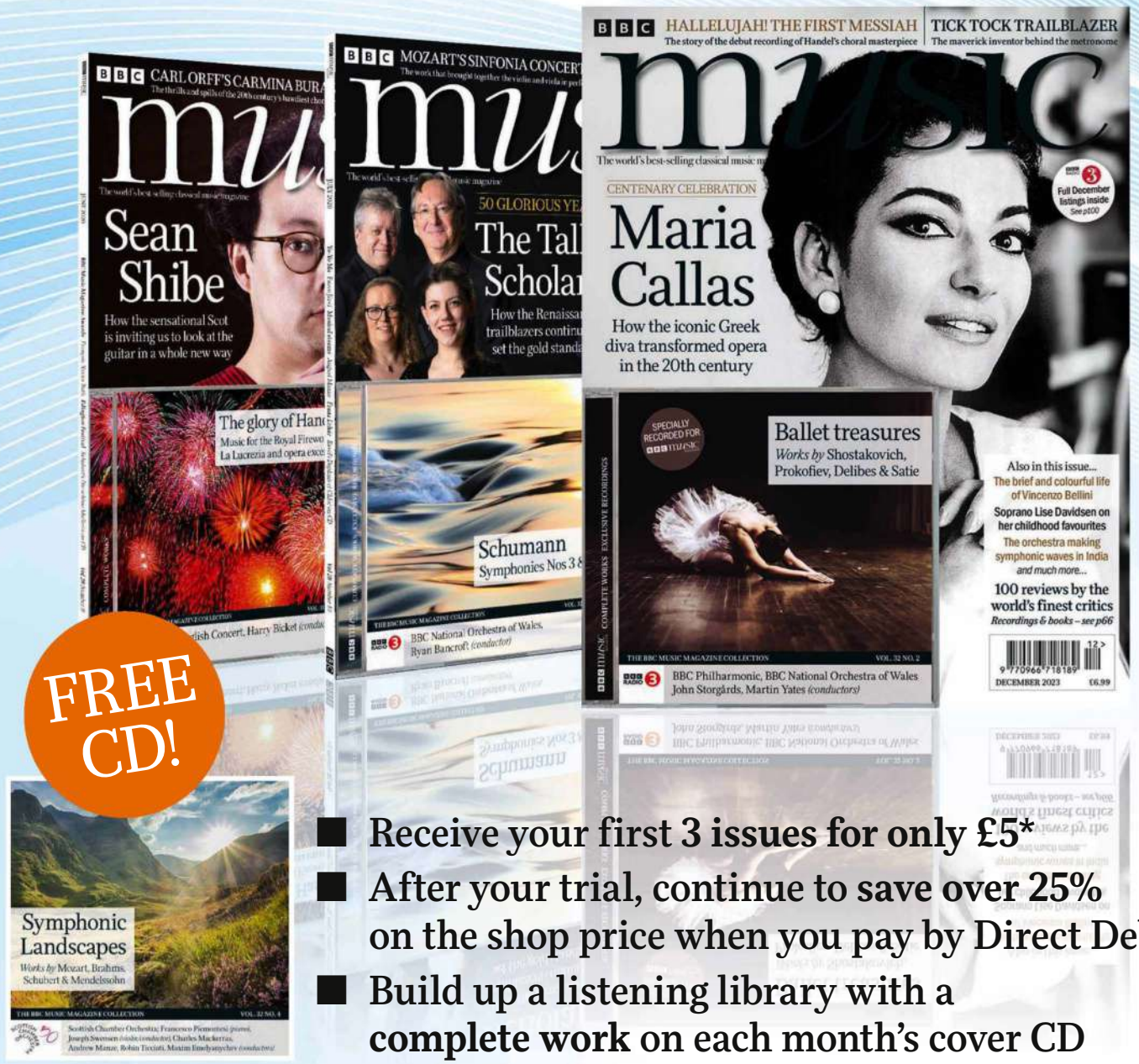
- Naturalisation Records
- London Crime And Punishment
- Records For The East Riding Of Yorkshire

FIND CEMETERY RECORDS ONLINE

GETTY IMAGES

TRY 3 ISSUES FOR £5

when you subscribe to BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE today!



FREE CD!

- Receive your first 3 issues for only £5*
- After your trial, continue to save over 25% on the shop price when you pay by Direct Debit
- Build up a listening library with a complete work on each month's cover CD

SUBSCRIBE ONLINE AT

www.ourmedia.com/MUHA24

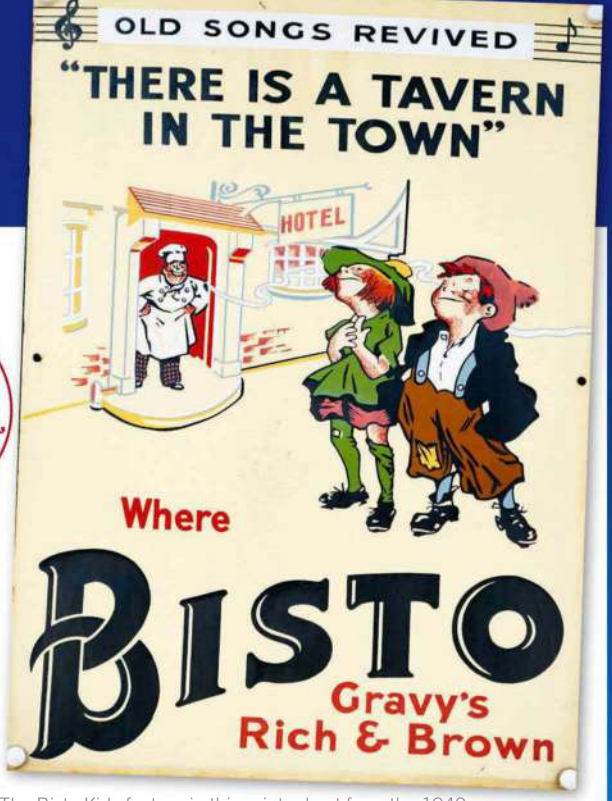
or call 03330 162 118† and quote ORDER CODE MUHA24

*This special introductory offer is available to new UK residents via Direct Debit only and is subject to availability. Offer ends 31st January 2025. The magazine used here is for illustrative purposes only, your subscription will start with the next available issue. After your first 3 issues, your subscription will continue at £29.99 every 6 issues thereafter, saving over 20% off the shop price. Full details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available upon request. †UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed line numbers (starting 01 or 02) and are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff). Outside of free call packages call charges from mobile phones will cost between 3p and 55p per minute. Lines are open Mon to Fri 9am to 5pm.

'George Helped To Invent Bisto'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Anthony Patterson's relation co-created a product that families have enjoyed for generations. By **Gail Dixon**



The Bisto Kids feature in this print advert from the 1940s

Do you remember the Bisto Kids? These TV and print adverts ran for years, and featured children tantalised by the aroma of gravy and sighing "Ah, Bisto". The product is familiar to many, but who invented it and why?

Anthony Patterson can answer these questions, because one of his relations helped to create Bisto. "The story begins when I discovered that my Patterson family owned an earthenware business on Tyneside," Anthony explains. "Through researching their lives, five years ago I met relatives I was unaware of before. One of them, my cousin Julia, explained that a relation of ours invented Bisto. This came as a surprise, because no one in the family had mentioned it before.

"Piqued by this information, I Googled Bisto gravy and discovered that it was created in 1908 and produced by Cerebos Ltd in Hartlepool, County Durham." The meat-flavoured powder could be added to water and juices to brown, season and thicken in one – hence the name 'Bisto'. The product rapidly became a bestseller in Britain, helped by clever advertising targeted at the mass market.

"Wikipedia states that Bisto was invented by 'Messrs Roberts & Patterson'. I later discovered that 'Roberts' was a mistake; it should be Mr JW McRobert, who also worked at Cerebos."

Newspaper reports into the development of Bisto revealed that Messrs McRobert and Patterson had often enjoyed Sunday dinners together.

On one occasion, their wives suggested that they create a product to simplify the laborious task of making gravy.

"Mr Patterson was named in various sources as George Howard Patterson, who I knew was my first cousin twice removed." He was born on Tyneside in 1859, the son of George Patterson and his wife Martha Gerrard. George senior ran Sheriff Hill Pottery in Gateshead, south of the Tyne.

After George junior left school he, too, became a master potter. He then joined Cerebos before 1901, and became its works manager. He married Elizabeth Ann Dickinson, a butcher's daughter from Washington, County Durham, and the couple had four children together.

George was a born inventor, receiving a number of patents during his career.

"The first was in 1901 for 'improvements in and relating to pencil holders'. Two years later he patented what was described as 'improvements in string cutters' with Benjamin Scott.

"In 1906, George and his Cerebos colleague Alan Watson patented a 'folding spout or pourer' to make it easier to remove goods from packaging."

George worked at Cerebos for almost 30 years and rose to become technical director of the firm, which may have been due to the huge success of Bisto.

JW McRobert also became a director of Cerebos, in recognition of his achievements.

George retired in 1926, and the occasion was marked with a large gathering of colleagues at Cerebos. The event was reported in an article in the *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, which explained that the company showed its gratitude by giving George "a fine cabinet gramophone of the latest model".

Anthony adds, "Mr Sanderson, the chair, remarked that he was glad to say that this wasn't a complete severance, because George would still retain his seat on the board of directors."

George was clearly highly respected by his employer and the staff at Cerebos. He enjoyed 11 years of retirement until he passed away in 1937, aged 77.

"I was delighted to find out that my relation helped to invent Bisto," Anthony reveals. "My mother and aunties often used Bisto, as my wife and I do now, and they would have been just as surprised as I am!"

George was a born inventor, receiving a number of patents during his career

ANTHONY PATTERSON is a retired pensions administrator. He lives in Stockton-on-Tees in County Durham

WHO'S YOUR HERO?

Share your family hero with us and they could appear in the magazine!

Each month we'll award our favourite a year's subscription to **findmypast.co.uk** worth £199.99.

Find my past

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

GETTY IMAGES

CRUISE COLLECTIVE

Voyage into the past

Follow your passion, explore the world by sea with the best deals, discounts and inspiration from Cruise Collective

Join Cruise Collective for free today

cruise-collective.com

This was Sylvia's promise to you...

A generation ago, a woman named Sylvia made a promise. As a doctor's secretary, she'd watched stroke destroy the lives of so many people. She was determined to make sure we could all live in a world where we're far less likely to lose our lives to stroke.

She kept her promise, and a gift to the Stroke Association was included in her Will. Sylvia's gift helped fund the work that made sure many more of us survive stroke now than did in her lifetime.

Sylvia changed the story for us all. Now it's our turn to change the story for those who'll come after us.

Stroke still shatters lives and tears families apart. And surviving a stroke is just the start of a long and gruelling recovery journey. If you or someone you love has been affected by stroke – you'll know just what that means.

You can change the story, just like Sylvia did, with a gift in your Will. All it takes is a promise.

You can promise future generations a world where researchers discover new treatments and surgeries, and stroke survivors and their families have the support to find the strength and determination they need to find their way back to life.

Your promise today gives strength for tomorrow. Please, leave a gift in your Will to the Stroke Association.

Find out how by calling 020 7566 1505 or email legacy@stroke.org.uk or visit stroke.org.uk/legacy

Finding **strength** through **support**

Stroke Association

The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789). Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (NPO 369), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.